STREET & SMITH'S

UNKNOWN

MAY
1939
20c

RETURNED FROM HELL
by STEVE FISHER

DANDRUFF can be MASTERED

Listerine Antiseptic kills the stubborn germ that causes dandruff

DAY after day they come . . . a steady stream of letters, from every part of the country . . . unsolicited corroboration of a *fact* demonstrated in laboratory and clinic—dandruff *can* be mastered with Listerine Antiseptic!

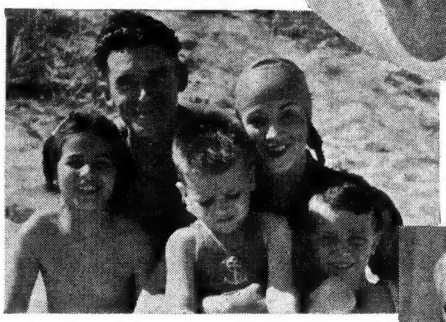
Sensational new disclosures definitely prove that dandruff is really a *germ disease!* . . . caused by the stubborn bacillus Pityrosporum ovale!

A wealth of scientific data now clearly points to *germicidal* treatment of dandruff. And clinics have proved that Listerine Antiseptic, famous for more than 25 years as a germicidal mouth wash and gargle, *does* master dandruff . . . *does* kill the dandruff germ!

In one clinic, 76% of the patients who used Listerine Antiseptic twice a day showed either complete disappearance of, or marked improvement in, the symptoms of dandruff within a month.

Now comes this overwhelming corroboration in countless enthusiastic letters. Read these few typical examples, and start your own delightful Listerine Antiseptic treatments today. Even after dandruff has disappeared it is a wise policy to take an occasional treatment to guard against reinfection.

Lambert Pharmacal Co., *St. Louis, Mo.*



"Last year my husband had a bad case of dandruff. Nothing he tried seemed to do any good for it. Finally I persuaded him to try Listerine Antiseptic. At the end of three weeks his dandruff had completely disappeared. Now we all take a Listerine Antiseptic treatment once or twice a month 'just in case,' and we haven't had even a suggestion of dandruff since."

MRS. ERWIN CARLSTEDT
Box 507, Boynton, Fla.

"After the first treatment my hair stopped falling out, and dandruff was practically gone. Since that time I have used nothing except Listerine Antiseptic on my scalp."

MRS. PAUL NESBITT
Chama, New Mexico

"Since using Listerine as a preventive for dandruff, I really feel safe as to my appearance in public."

HENRY W. SCHLETER
Oshkosh, Wis.

"After the first application the intense itching stopped."

MR. JOHN KEESER
Walden, N. Y.

"The most effective treatment for dandruff I ever tried."

MRS. S. C. SLOAN
West Palm Beach, Florida

THE TREATMENT

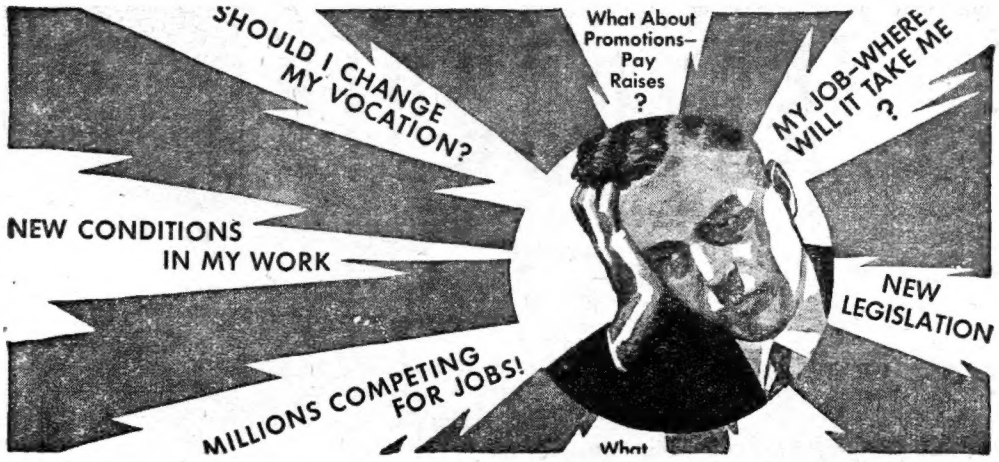
MEN: Douse Listerine Antiseptic on the scalp *at least once a day.* **WOMEN:** Part the hair at various places, and apply Listerine Antiseptic right along the part with a medicine dropper, to avoid wetting the hair excessively.

Always follow with vigorous and persistent massage. But don't expect overnight results, because germ conditions cannot be cleared up that fast.

Genuine Listerine Antiseptic is guaranteed not to bleach the hair or affect texture.

Good Housekeeping Bureau

LISTERINE ANTISEPTIC
the proved treatment for DANDRUFF



WHERE DO YOU GO FROM HERE?

YOU'RE like a million other men—you're facing a *big* question. The depression turned business topsy-turvy and now the rebuilding period stares you in the face.

Are the things that are happening today going to help or hinder you—what will they mean in your pay check? Where will they put you five, ten, twenty years from now? How can you take full advantage of this period of opportunity?

We believe you will find the answer here—a suggestion the soundness of which can be proven to you as it has been to thousands of other men.

The whole trend today—legislation, spirit, action—is to put men back to work, raise earning and spending power, *give every man a fair chance to work out his own salvation.*

The road to success remains unchanged but, bear this in mind, *what it takes to win is radically different!*

No employer today would dare risk an important post in the hands of a man who had not learned the lesson of '29. Why should he, when right at this moment he can pick and choose and get almost any man he wants at his own price?

Business organizations are rebuilding—reorganizing for the new conditions. Before it is over every man and every method will be judged in the cold light of reason and experience—then dropped, remade or retained. This spells real opportunity for the man who can meet the test—but heaven help the man who still tries to meet today's problems from yesterday's standpoint! Out of the multitude still jobless there are sure to be many frantically eager to prove him wrong and take his place.

Some Men Have Found the Answer

Seeing these danger signs, many aggressive men and women are quietly training at home—are wisely building themselves for more efficient service to their employers.

You naturally ask, "Has your training helped men withstand conditions of the last few years?"

Our answer is to point to a file of letters from many of our students reporting *pay raises and promotions while business was at its lowest ebb*—together with a myriad of others telling of greater success during these recent months of recovery.

Unusual evidence is ready for your investigation. We have assembled much of it in a booklet that is yours for the asking, along with a new and vitally interesting pamphlet on your business field.

This is a serious study of the possibilities and opportunities in that field. It is certain to contain an answer to vital questions bothering you today about your own work and earning power.

Send for these booklets—coupon brings them free. Be sure to check the LaSalle training that interests you most. We will tell you also how you can meet and take fullest advantage of today's situation. No cost or obligation—so why not mail the coupon now?

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY
A Correspondence Institution Dept. 465-R, Chicago

Please send me—without cost or obligation—full information about how I can, through your training, equip myself for the new problems and opportunities in the business field I have checked.

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- ☐ Law: Degree of LL.B.
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ Industrial Management
- ☐ Stenotypy
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- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Traffic Management
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Business English
- ☐ Salesmanship

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STREET & SMITH'S

UNKNOWN

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CONTENTS MAY, 1939 VOL. I NO. 3

COVER BY H. W. SCOTT

FEATURE NOVEL

RETURNED FROM HELL . . . . . Steve Fisher 9
A fool thought he looked like Satan, and he played with devil-worship. And—the fool was dead, but Satan—

NOVELETTE

DANGER IN THE DARK . . . . . L. Ron Hubbard . . 59
One little white man who didn't know Tadamona, the shark-god of the South Seas

SHORT STORIES

THE MISSING OCEAN . . . . . H. W. Guernsey 47
The captain loved the sea—and he loved being the one big frog in his own little puddle—

THE CLOAK . . . . . Robert Bloch 75
"Authentic," the costumer said. He was NOT lying!

THE PIPING DEATH . . . . . Robert Moore Williams 87
Shrill little pipes whistling—and the dry snake scales rustling to the call!

WHATEVER . . . . . Mona Farnsworth . . . 97
He was sick, of course—but still, was it dream, or delirium, or—were the little goats something else?

SERIAL

DIVIDE AND RULE! . . . . . L. Sprague de Camp . 105
The miracle of small inventions we overlook. Things like flea powder, for instance!

READERS' DEPARTMENTS

OF THINGS BEYOND . . . 6
Editorial Prophecy and Future Issues.

"—AND HAVING WRIT—" 155
The readers speak their minds.

Illustrations by: Cartier, Fisk, Gilmore, Kirchner, Orban and Rogers.

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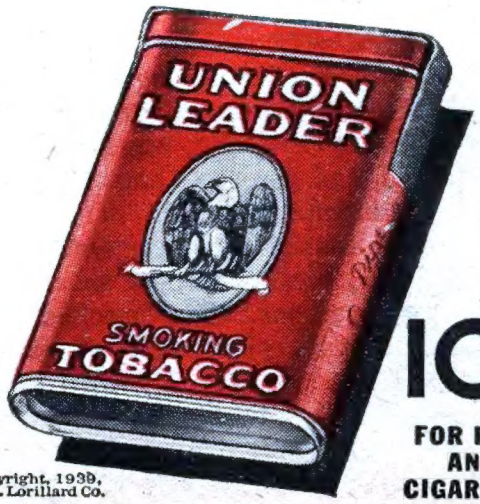
The rich hill-grown Kentucky Burley that goes into Union Leader is specially aged to add greater mellowness, specially processed to increase mildness and freedom from bite.

Yes, sir! When a young man chooses Union Leader for either pipe or cigarette, he's wise beyond his years! And, in the years to come, this kindly flavorful tobacco will repay his choice by making his bad times good and his good times better!



Union Leader

THE GREAT AMERICAN SMOKE

10¢

FOR PIPE AND CIGARETTE

Copyright, 1939, by P. Lorillard Co.

Of Things Beyond

It has always interested me that the Chinese, who, a thousand years ago, discovered facts that Western science is finding only today, never developed that knowledge to usable form. A thousand years' lead—and they lost the race for lack of one simple theory. The Chinese philosophers, who knew so many things, never attained the most basic theory of science.

There is order in Nature.

Two facts, to the Chinese philosophers, tended to be two separate facts. The two facts might be "gunpowder explodes to a puff of gas," and "a puff of air blown into a tube will blow a pea, or bit of metal, out the other end," but the Chinese did not connect the facts. They did not select their facts, did not arrange and interrelate them to an ordered, useful basis for prediction of more facts.

The needful basis of science is that understanding that there is order in Nature, that facts can be selected and arranged to a reasonable, interacting whole. The step that immediately follows is the selection of *which facts, or supposed facts, are to be used.* "The Earth is flat" was a "fact" that had to be weeded out. There are many others. There were yet more that had to be filed temporarily in the "Unclassified" division of things true, but not yet fitting into the ordered scheme so far developed.

Therein lies the weakness of science; it cannot use all truths! If truths it cannot fit in come up, it must, for its self-preservation and for the preservation of its usefulness, blind itself to those nonconforming, distracting facts until such time as their relationship to the rest of Nature can be shown.

There are many, many such things. Things known—and unknown; unknown in that their relationship to present facts cannot be shown. They are in a vague limbo of things remembered as truths, but truths that are now too few to establish a line of investigation. As two points a half mile apart will not establish the curvature of the Earth, so many of these "Unclassified" truths do not show the picture they must, some day, reveal.

They are the unknown. These things like Eric Frank Russell's drifting lights at night, and the mass of other things beside all science. Like the vague, half-glimpsed truths of telepathy Dr. Rhine investigates.

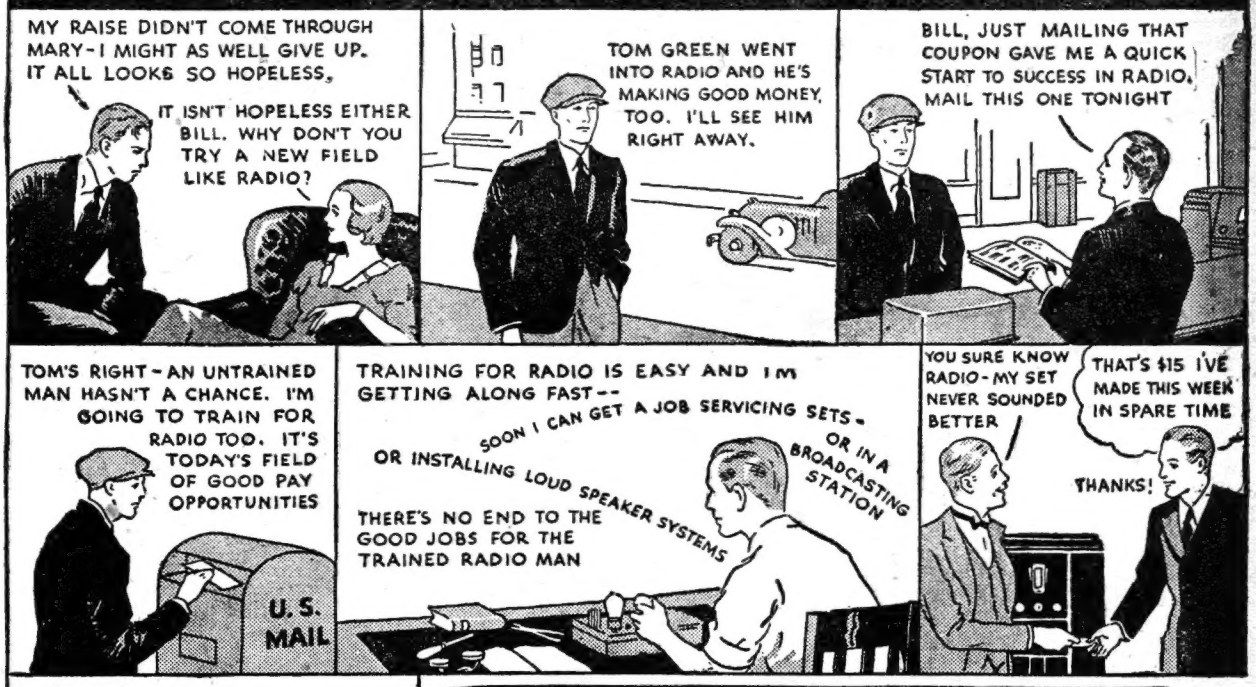
I mention these things because I have a question I would ask you, the readers. Do you want occasional articles of these truths from the limbo of science? An article made up of things that are, but have no meaning men can now see? Or should UNKNOWN be, as now, purely fiction?

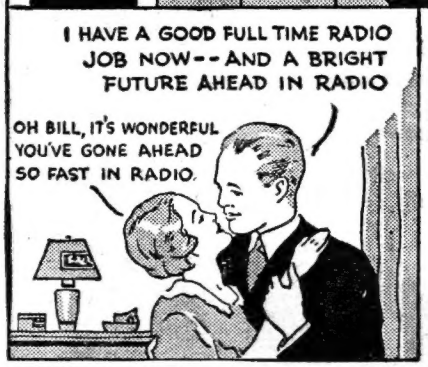
For next month it will be pure fiction—pure entertainment, with Norvell Page leading the issue with forty thousand words of tense action in a limbo tale from history. Who was Prester John, of whom the first Crusaders vaguely heard, ruling a vast empire in the heart of Asia, land of magic? Page has an answer—and a swift-moving tale of strange adventure.

Too, next month H. W. Guernsey returns with a completely delightful little man—a very precise little man with a precise and malicious humor. *The Hexer* is not a tale to miss!

THE EDITOR.

HE THOUGHT HE WAS LICKED—THEN A TIP GOT BILL A GOOD JOB!





I'LL TRAIN YOU AT HOME *In Your Spare Time For A* GOOD RADIO JOB

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute
Established 25 years.

He has directed the training of more men for Radio than anyone else.

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The day you enroll I start sending Extra Money Job Sheets; show you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training I send plans and directions that made good spare time money—$200 to $500—for hundreds, while learning. I send you special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 method of training makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE RADIO SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make good money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time jobs after graduation.

Find Out What Radio Offers You

Act Today. Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It's free to any fellow over 16 years old. It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my training in Radio and Television; shows you letters from men I trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Find out what Radio offers YOU! MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a postcard—NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 9DD
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

THIS FREE BOOK HAS HELPED HUNDREDS OF MEN MAKE MORE MONEY

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National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out the opportunities in Radio and explains your 50-50 method of training men at home to become Radio Experts. (Please Write Plainly.)

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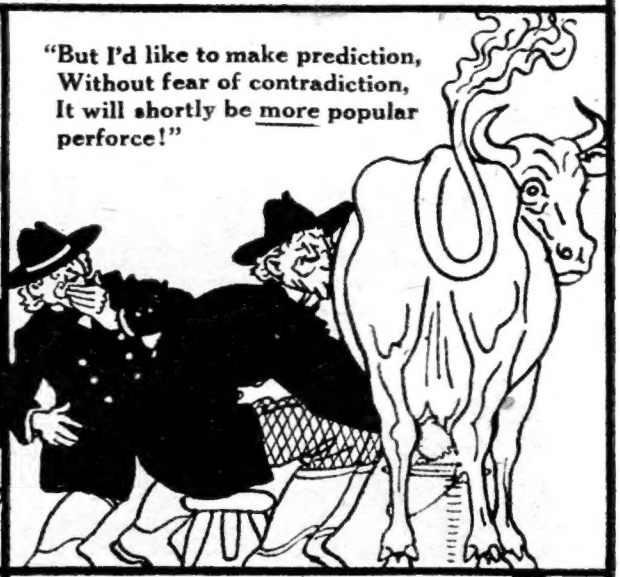
Mr. Mattingly & Mr. Moore discover a truth about fine whiskey!



THERE'S a blue ribbon entry in fine whiskey values... and its name is Mattingly & Moore!

You see, M & M is ALL whiskey ... every drop *slow*-distilled. What's more—M & M is *a blend of straight whiskies*—the kind of whiskey we think you'll agree is *tops!*

Get M & M at your favorite bar or package store—*today!* Start treating yourself to a grand, mellow whiskey—at a grand, low price!

Mattingly & Moore

Long on Quality—Short on Price!

A blend of straight whiskies—90 proof—every drop is whiskey.
Frankfort Distilleries, Incorporated, Louisville and Baltimore.

This advertisement is not intended to offer alcoholic beverages for sale or delivery in any state or community where the advertising, sale or use thereof is unlawful.

RETURNED FROM HELL

By STEVE FISHER

TO reach the south of France and the Riviera from Paris is a journey of some two days, so that Deauville and its twin beach resort of Trouville generally attract the Parisians in August, and the English from across the bleak Channel almost any week that it is sunny.

One arrives somewhat fatigued with pictures in his mind of lavish French palaces, and gay buntings, and beaches crammed to the brim with voluptuous

blond women; but instead the community seems not unlike Ocean Park in California, and the people on the beaches do not look a great deal different; while the identical drab and foreboding hotels encountered in Paris seem to rise in a wall on every side, each outdoing the other with special rates. The streets are narrow and winding and filled with women and children in bathing suits; and young men strolling around wearing white duck trousers; the sun is not so scorching as the ads had led to hope, and the gendarme directing traffic on the corner has no smile to offer for driving at such a breakneck speed to arrive.

But suddenly a sign announces that this is Trouville, a beach for people either of lesser means or greater sanity, and the select Deauville lies a quarter of a mile over, across a wooden bridge. There is one great difference. In Deauville the hotels charge the outrageous price of ten to twelve dollars a day, while in Trouville rooms twice the size are only a dollar. However, an American usually wishes to distinguish himself, and—a little bewildered but not to be outdone—he is apt to end up in a second-rate rooming house in Deauville itself. He gets a room with a view of the casino and immediately settles down to the grim business of figuring out a system to beat the wheels.

HOPE MANNERS arrived with ideas slightly different from those of a tourist.

Hope was an American, and one of those girls with shiny yellow hair that is like copper, and flashing blue eyes that contrasts the glistening red of her lips. Her skin was tan and lovely. She was not just pretty. She was strikingly beautiful. But it was her figure which stunned you. There was something magnetic in her walk, the swing of her graceful hips, the way her breasts rose and fell when she breathed deeply, that inspired awe in the soul of a connoisseur.

The day she arrived she wore a tight green sweater which was a mold over her pointed and shapely busts; her waist was thin, and the skirt that fell softly from her hips drew a curved line that was very nearly artistry. Her legs were nicely rounded and gorgeously shaped.

But then Hope Manners' figure was her fortune. She was a strip-tease queen. Perhaps the youngest of them all, for she was breath-takingly refreshing. Her singing voice was good; and her laughter was velvet music. She had accepted a contract in the Deauville casino for the summer months. It was a good contract, better than most show people suspected the French would pay. She was to be the star attraction.

However, she had two days before the show was to be changed to include her, and she looked carefully around Deauville before she decided on a room. It was not near the beach. It was small, and inexpensive and clean. She moved into it, then abandoned herself to relaxation for what little time she had left.

She put on a white one-piece bathing suit and went to the beach. She swam a little, and when she came out of the water the suit was tighter than ever on her. She wanted to explore, and she walked up and down in the sand. A pack of Frenchmen followed her like hounds, and she was amused. One of them caught up with her.

"Ah, mademoiselle, vous-etes"—he kissed his fingers and waved them into the air—*"vous-etes tres chic! Voulez-vous allez avec moi—"*

"Do you speak English?" she asked.

"Ah, oui! Yes, yes, yes—"

"Then the answer's no," she said.

SHE LEFT the astonished Frenchman and walked on alone.

She went beyond the regular bathing beach and almost to the end of the actual city limits of Deauville. The sky had

darkened, and large black clouds tumbled across it, like bowling balls. The sea, frothed deep blue, and threw in white-crested waves that pounded incessantly on the sand. She was quite alone now, paying little attention to anything in particular, when she looked up and saw it.

It was a huge old château which stood there on the beach smothered in clusters of dying ivy. The windows were tightly shuttered, and the ugly and solitary gloom of the place struck a note of momentary terror in her very soul.

The château was so gaunt and bleak it somehow offended her sense of reality. It seemed impossible that such a miserable and decrepit edifice should be allowed to remain. It was a spidery pagoda of steeples and little towers; its turrets and balconies were unshapely bulges. Yet there was in the cold gloom of this house a shivery fascination which held her eyes.

She turned to go back to her room, but she couldn't forget the haunting specter of the château; the dark windows behind gave her that nervous unease of being stared at. That night during dinner she realized that it was a plague and obsession in her memory. She kept seeing it as it had stood today in a distorted silhouette against the great gray clouds floating past, and the heavy blue sea which had pounded behind.

Like the tinny rhythm of a stupid song, Hope couldn't rid her mind of it, and that night she returned to take another look. She was sorry she had come. Her whole body shivered with a cold and damp sweat. She had not known how it would be to see the château by night. The windows were open now, and they stared out with sickly yellow illumination. The steeples and spirals protruded like bony fingers against the blue of the stars; the wind whispered and whined about the corners and crevices. The whole atmosphere was dankly fetid and evil. But as she turned to go she realized that she would never forget the house. The mystery of what went on within—who might want to tenant such a place—tormented her with a consciousness she had never been aware she possessed.

She turned to walk off, but as she did, something like a scream floated out through the night, and she turned, cold and rigid with fear, to gaze at the ageless and defiant château. She heard the wind, even now, humming and whistling; and there was in her ears the undertone of a crashing surf. She told herself the scream must have been in her mind: an echo born of the terror the house-by-the-sea suggested. She turned and ran.

II.

THE CASINO hummed with the clink and click of its special activities. The stage show went on, act after act, accompanied by the loud music of a French band. The show was not so good as it was lengthy. Vaudeville was by no means dead here. Trained seals, juggling acts, acrobats, song-and-dance patters—French and English—comedy skits, hula numbers, everything went, and each act featured different people. It was a combination show, unlike any in America. People watched or didn't, as they saw fit. There were several rows of seats like a theater for those with nothing better to do than watch the entertainment, but the audience sauntered in and out at will. There was a long bar on each side of the room, both of which were in view of the stage, so customers could drink and chat and still find time to glance now and then at the busy stage.

In the rear there were two rows of gambling tables—boule, played for any stakes from a franc up; or people could amuse themselves with a little idle gambling, and also watch the acts as they came on. The big-moneyed games were in private and very exclusive rooms.

They were as difficult to get into as the Stork Club. You paid what amounted to five dollars simply for the privilege of entering, and it was in these rooms where baccarat and roulette won and lost fortunes. Women—particularly thrifty wives—were not allowed to enter. In addition to all this, there was another large room in which went on current American motion pictures—for the bored and furious wives who could get no message through to their feverishly gambling mates.

Hope Manners sat in her dressing room; she was fully costumed and ready to go on. But there was a pen in her hand; she wrote rapidly. She was writing to her sister Brenda, in New York:

—and after having been here a week, I don't know whether I like it or not. It's different, of course; and there are a few Americans here with acts, but they are mostly married teams, and I cannot call any of them close friends—

—there are several things which disturb me—one, a house here, a terrible, spooky château; it would mean nothing except that I have learned that a Monsieur Roger Lackey lives in it—apparently alone with his servants—and the gentleman has been here in the casino every night watching me. I have constantly turned down his dates; but he keeps sending flowers, and staring at me with a light in his eyes which is frightening. He is a tall man, and there is something peculiar about him.

The buzzer sounded, and she leaped to her feet. It was time to go on. But as she hurried down the long corridor to the stage, she was thinking of New York, and of Bud Worth, the song writer whom she had loved and left. They had argued over her contract to leave the country; he was working on a musical show and couldn't come. She was beginning to realize her life was emptiness without Bud.

She wanted to think of this, and not of Roger Lackey. But when she had first seen that brooding, sprawling château, the mystery of what human being could choose such a place for a home had gnawed at her imagination. Now Roger Lackey gnawed at her imagination in the same half-fearful way. For the château was the preordained and only proper background for the man. It was a background which rose in a gray shroud and blocked in silhouette his tall, caped figure.

She was on the stage now. The curtains parted. The band struck up a melody. There was applause from all over the casino. She began to strut; she sang snatches of the song. She was smiling now: the painted smile of something which is beautiful.

WHEN she came off she wrapped a thin robe about her body and hurried to the dressing room. She didn't see Roger Lackey until she looked up. The breath went out of her then; and she was cold with a terrible chill.

He stood there, leaning against the dressing-room door. He was tall and broad-shouldered; in his thinning black hair there were vivid streaks of gray. He had a high forehead, and a slanting oval face, the chin of which was pointed. There was a constant hint of someone—someone unpleasant but indefinite—that she had known before about him. His evening clothes fitted him tightly, and he wore a heavy black cape. He was smiling.

"Ah, cherie," he said, "we meet."

"Quite so."

She saw now that his face glistened; he was as intent and as lithe as a fox. He seemed to see every part of her—the white skin of her body through the thin coolie coat, but with a coldly analytic, detached keenness that chilled her.

"Midnight dinner, perhaps?" he said.

"No."

He stared into her eyes, and she tried to fight the gaze; it was almost hyp-

notic. "Has no one told you of my occupation?"

"I haven't asked."

"Perhaps you should. One would not treat so lightly a man whos fascinating profession is bringing to life the dead."

The words flowed smoothly; she wanted to scream.

"The dead from their coffins," he went on. Then he saw her expression. "I did not mean to alarm you; I thought it an inducement. Most people are interested—"

"You're insane," she whispered.

He seemed amused. "Some day you will realize that you accuse me falsely." He reached out and touched her throat.

"Take your hand off me!" she whispered.

He stepped back, quickly, angrily. "As you wish, mam'selle."

She slammed into the dressing room. The strength had drained from her. She felt weak. She sagged against the door and listened to his footsteps echo in the hall. Then she stiffened. They did not sound like footsteps at all, but rather like the *tap-tap-tap* of cloven hoofs.

SHE WAS very nearly hysterical, but she finished her other two performances, and then she could not get dressed and out quickly enough.

She hurried down the front steps and climbed into a waiting taxi. She rattled off her address in French. The car started up, and she sat back to gather her thoughts. The combination of loneliness and the alienness of the country were driving her imagination. The pressing, ineradicable memory of the château—Lackey's theatrical mannerisms and claims— Imagination!

The sedan traveled swiftly, and its wheels hummed; but she noticed with sudden alarm that they were on the beach road. Deauville had dropped behind. She bent forward to speak to the driver, but the glass had been closed, and she could not push it open.

She gasped for her breath, and stared out the window. The car was slowing down. There was only an empty stretch of sand here. The white and gleaming moon rolled out over the sea and cast a flat and unreal light.

The car stopped. She saw the driver climb out. She tried the door. If she could get it open and leap from the car— She was struggling with the handle when she saw the driver's bleak white face. She had never seen the face before, and it frightened her.

But the face disappeared suddenly, and there was a hand holding a gun, pointed in through the open window. The voice came now, and it had no accent.

"I've got orders to leave your clothes on the beach," it said.

"My *what?*"

"Either the clothes or you, with a bullet through your head."

"But—"

"There isn't much time!"

"But what's to happen to *me?*" She was terrified; she could scarcely get the words from her lips.

"Whatever it is, you won't die, provided you hand over the clothes. I can't tell you anything else. I don't know anything else. I've got my orders, that's all. Either I leave the clothes there with you in them, or I just leave the clothes. Come on, sister, peel!"

"I I refuse!"

"Listen, babe, I'm not fooling about shooting you. I'll give you three seconds. Either you start shedding, or—"

She shuddered, as he counted, then she began pulling at her dress to get it off. Her hands were tensely steady. She handed him the dress.

"Come on, I want the rest," the voice said.

"But—"

"Listen, lady. When you vanish, see, it's supposed to look like you went moonlight bathing, and the waves got you."

"Vanish?"

"That's what I said. Come on with the rest of that stuff."

The wind was whining and moaning, and something—some human cry—floated out and blended with the sob of the wind; the surf kept crashing. Then suddenly the face of the Devil was pressed against the window of the car. The cheekbones were high; there were flames in the eyes, the chin was pointed. There was laughter curved on the thin lips.

III.

THE PIANO tinkled emptily through the room, and the sounds of New York echoed up from Broadway, which lay below, with its trolleys going by, and the busses; the deep rumble of the subways, and the chatter of a million parading people. The piano kept tinkling through this, picking out notes, repeating them, then going on. It was not a song; just fragments of melody that might some day be put together. Then suddenly there was the noise of the door opening, and the piano stopped. Bud Worth did not turn on the stool, but his lean fingers no longer touched the ivory keys.

Brenda entered the room and closed the door. She was a pretty girl, with hair that was like ebony; her features were pale and delicate, and her eyes were shiny eyes which had seen the whole noisy glitter of Manhattan pass by, and had remained somehow unimpressed. She was a young girl; younger than her sister who had gone to France, and she had less experience. She "sang for her supper" in a honkatonk on Forty-fourth Street, and the grind had become incredibly monotonous. She didn't know where the glamour had gone. Out the window, perhaps. The glamour might have been a princess who sat on steeple tops and laughed magically down on the struggling of human beings.

She stood there, watching the thin man who was garbed in his shirt sleeves and sat at the piano. It was her room, but he came when he wanted, because he had no piano in his own apartment, and the writing of love songs was a thing which put butter on his bread. Brenda discarded her hat and pulled at her gloves.

Bud Worth swung around then. His face was thin and tired, and a little sweaty; there were dark rings under his eyes. He was a very old man at thirty, it seemed. He knew all the ins and outs; the lingo; the heartbreak, that which was fake. He knew all the corny musicians in Times Square and the clubs on Fifty-second. He'd been a success; and a failure. But never one or the other all by itself: he was constantly a combination of both, so that the ambition which had fluttered in his heart was half stale by now, and he didn't know whether school kept, nor did he care. He sniffed—those damned summer colds—and brushed back a lock of his stringy hair.

"Hello, Brend; what's hot on the Rialto?"

"The sidewalk," she said.

He half smiled; but bitterness ate away the full smile like acid might. "I saw the letter."

"What letter?"

"The one Hope wrote you from Deauville."

"Oh."

"I read it," he went on; it was not an apology, simply a statement. "I hope you don't mind."

"Not at all," said Brenda, listlessly. She shrugged off the thin coat and walked out into the dingy kitchenette and poured herself a glass of water.

"YOU want to know something, Brend?"

She put down the glass. "What?"

"I love Hope. No matter how much we fought about her going away on that

contract. I love her like the little orphans love Christmas. I can't keep pouring out these crappy songs when I've got a love like that eating away."

"I thought the songs were about things like that."

"Maybe so. But you can't write them when you *feel* it. That's why Broadway songs are phony, babe. Guys just don't moon so poetically. They feel more like jumping out of a window. They're turned inside out; they don't want to eat; they're sick. That's what love is. It's a tormenting damn thing. But you can't do without it. You know, it's funny, but I've found that out."

"So what are you going to do?"

"I've got a few bucks in the sock," he said; "not enough, God knows, but it'll have to do. I'm going over."

"To France?"

"Yep. As Cohan said: Good-by, Broadway, you miserable tinhorn avenue, with your Mafoofskys and your hicks, I hope to hell I never see you again."

"George Cohan never said all that."

"No, he just said, 'Good-by, Broadway' I'm saying the rest. I'm thumbing my nose at the whole gaudy mess. Nine years of it, and I feel like somebody's cut me up and left me to bleed. So I'm shoving off. Third class on a cattle boat if I have to. I'll turn kept man and let Hope support me if worst comes to worst. *Anything*. But I've got to be near her. I've got to be there with her. That's the way the world happens to be made. They put stars up in heaven for Hope and me, and now the damn stars are going to waste, and pretty soon they'll fade out. They made melody so Hope could hear it and think of me—"

"Write that; write that into a song."

"I wish I could, babe. You don't wish it any more than me."

He got up and stretched. He grabbed his suit coat and put it on. "I hung around till you got home from work. I wanted to tell you good-by."

"You're leaving so soon?"

"I'm going to find out which is the first boat, then I'm going to climb aboard. I've already packed my socks and my toothbrush."

"I'm sorry to see you go, Bud."

He walked up and patted her cheek. "I don't know whether you are or not; but I'll tell your sister you were asking about her and"—he reached over and kissed Brenda—"I'll take that along with me and give it to her."

He turned and moved to the door. "Well, so long, Brend; you're a sweet baby. You're the sweetest kid that ever came to this damn town. It's too bad I've got to break my heart for some twist that's halfway across the world; but that's the way it is."

He went out, and the door closed.

Brenda Manners stood there.

BRENDA'S LIFE continued drably the same, through the heat of summer days. Subways shot like rockets to Coney; kids ate melting ice-cream cones; cops swore and cursed. New York was crammed to the brim with World's Fair tourists. Then, like the stab of a knife, the first cable came:

HOPE VANISHED. BELIEVED DEAD. MORE LATER. BUD.

Four long days crept by like air-cooled hearses; boats steamed up and down the Hudson and the East River; excursion trains left for Bear Mountain. Brenda went on singing the same old torch songs in the Forty-fourth Street club, but her voice was shaky, and her face was pale. The second cable came then:

I AM TERRIBLY SICK. BUD.

Two days later there was a third cable:

I AM AN AMERICAN IN DEAUVILLE WHO USED TO KNOW BUD WORTH WHEN HE WAS ON BROADWAY. I

WAS WITH HIM IN HIS ROOM WHEN HE DIED. I WAS PRESENT AT HIS FUNERAL AND BURIAL. HIS LAST MESSAGE WAS THAT I SHOULD CABLE YOU. YOU MAY CHECK MY CREDENTIALS CRAIG PRIVATE DETECTIVE AGENCY IN NEW YORK SO YOU WILL KNOW THIS CABLE IS AUTHENTIC. I AM GRIEVED TO BEAR SUCH NEWS. DISEASE FROM WHICH BUD DIED UNKNOWN.

PETER CRAIG.

Brenda was filled with panic, dread and regret. She called up the Craig Agency, and they told her only that Peter Craig was in Deauville on business for a wealthy American client.

Brenda went to the New York police. But they had already received word of Hope's disappearance. Her clothing had been found on a beach, and it was the verdict of the French coroner that she had gone moonlight swimming and had drowned. No, her body had not been found. They promised to check up on Bud's death, but they warned her that it was an apparently natural demise.

Brenda was filled with anguish and despair. Bud *or* Hope—but with both gone— She felt she should do something, and yet she didn't know what *could* be done. The days paraded on, mercilessly; time would not stand still. The sun beat down on the cement streets; traffic kept streaming into New York; steamer after steamer barged into the harbor with visitors. Crowds thonged the streets. Life became faster, tenser; living rose in a jagged line of fever. Existence, singing, subways, people, honking taxis, reached a crescendo. Then came the last cable:

I CANNOT SAY WHAT I WISH TO SAY IN A CABLE. YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE IF I DID. I DON'T MYSELF. BUT BELIEVE ME I MUST SEE YOU AT ONCE. I CANNOT COME HOME. HOPE LIVES. I HAVE SEEN HER IN A SHINY GLASS COFFIN, BUT SHE WAS BREATHING. THIS SOUNDS CRAZY BUT COME AND LET ME TELL YOU IN MY OWN WORDS. I AM IN PARIS PLAYING PIANO IN THE CAFE DE LA MORT RAT. PLEASE COME AT ONCE.

BUD WORTH.

It was some preposterous trick! Someone had sent that cable and signed Bud's name. It was someone's very bad joke, and she wouldn't fall for it. So she cabled back to test his identity:

WHAT IS THE NAME OF THE LAST SONG YOU WROTE IN NEW YORK?

He cabled back the correct answer at once. She shuddered; but in the next instant she was on the telephone.

"I want the fastest boat—"

IV.

PARIS—porters, trainmen. The Gare St. Lazare— Crowds, Frenchmen jabbering, a streaming line of cabs. *"Chargez les baggage—"* The streets, and red and blue neon lights, the Café De La Paix, the Opera; Concorde, and the Champs-Elysees, glittering through the night with its fountains and green-leaved trees. The hotel: *"Combien comptez-vous par jour?"* Tourist-book French. Unpacking hurriedly, now downstairs, another taxi: "Café De La Mort Rat. *Comprendez-vous?"*

"Oui, m'selle. Toute suite."

Across the Seine, to the south side; the Eiffel Tower blocked away there in the night sky; now it was falling behind them. Down the Boulevard Mich'; past the University Français, into narrow, winding streets; jogging cobblestones, gas lights instead of electric; men who stood leaning against buildings, wearing turtle-neck sweaters and tams. Farther and farther the cab kept speeding— At last: brakes squealing like young pigs. The café of the Dead Rat. A steamy window, men and women going in and out.

Brenda paid the driver. She handed

him a hundred-franc note and didn't wait for change. She pushed through the swinging doors. Tables: bitters and cognac. Cigarette smoke. A tinkling piano. She saw Bud Worth's thin back, and she knew that it was he, but when he turned around she did not recognize him.

His eyes were dead things there in the hollow sockets. The white skin of his face had dropped back against prominent cheekbones; the jaw sagged a little. He sniffed, and shoved back a lock of his hair. He wore a high-necked blue sweater; a cigarette clung to his lower lip. At first he did not seem to know her. He looked as though he were a dead man.

"Bud—"

"Oh, yes," he said, 'you."

"Bud, can we get out of here and talk?"

He nodded. "Sure."

He climbed to his feet, but he was unsteady. He reeled out of the place and she followed him. They walked down the dark street together without speaking; then he turned into a doorway and began to climb a flight of creaky wooden stairs. She hesitated, then went up after him.

HE LIVED on the second floor. He held open his room door and she went in. She stood there rigidly, as he closed the door, and he came quietly up behind her and kissed her neck. He laughed, but it was a whispering laughter. He waved his hand out at an old bed.

"Sit down."

She obeyed. She brushed back her ebony hair, and turned her eyes up to survey him. He swayed back and held onto the dresser.

"Maybe you think I'm drunk. But I'm not. It's just . look, Brenda. You see me here, don't you?"

She nodded.

"I'm not dead."

Obviously.

"You don't believe I died, and they put me in a coffin and threw the earth over me?"

"Obviously not. But what did happen?"

He opened the dresser drawer and pulled out a bottle of cognac. "That." He poured some of it into a glass and drank it down. He wiped his mouth and sniffed. "I died, Brenda," he went on. "Maybe that makes me a dead man. I dunno. I feel like one. I feel like a corpse, all right. I'll try and tell you how it was."

"I wish you would."

"I went to the casino in Deauville," he said, "looking for Hope. That was when I found out that she had vanished, and her clothes were found on the beach. I was pretty well desperate. I went around asking questions. I guess I must have talked to every ham actor there—French and Spanish and English alike, before I was through. I tormented the croupiers with questions. I talked to fifty or sixty people. Nobody knew anything. The gendarmes told me Hope had gone swimming and never came back. That sounded lousy to me. I said so. Hope swims like old man Neptune's daughter.

"Then I got sick. I don't know what it was. My heart would beat fast, and I felt dizzy. I never had any trouble with my heart before. I tried not to pay any attention to it, but one night I collapsed in the casino. An American by the name of Peter Craig took me home. He got me a doctor. The French quack diagnosed everything from a toothache on up. And I got worse. I got a fever. I lay there in the bed sweating. I lost five pounds in twenty-four hours.

"And all the time this American detective—this Peter Craig—stayed there with me. He did a lot of talking, but I can't remember much of what he said.

I remember telling him to send you a cable about me dying. That was when I knew it was the end. I passed out of the picture gloriously. What do you think I did? Did you think I sang my best ballad, or wept because I was going; do you think all my life projected up before my eyes in a 'Thanks-for-the-memory' patter of wistful melody and popcorn picnics? No. I was so damn sick I didn't think about anything, and I didn't care. I was too weak to be able to care."

He took another drink of cognac.

Brenda stared at him, and she was breathing deeply.

"Everything faded, and when I came to I was on a table in somebody's house. A château of some kind. It was the most horrible place I'd ever been in. I opened my eyes, and there was a man working over me. Only he didn't look like a man. He looked—Brenda, this sounds incredible but you've *got* to believe me—he looked like pictures you've seen of Satan. He was staring at me with terrible eyes, and when he saw I was breathing he chuckled. He attached something to my chest. He sewed it right into my skin. He'd already deadened the skin with some dope, I guess, because I didn't feel it. Then he turned to some big guy that was there, and said: 'Dress him and release him.'"

BUD WORTH ran his hand down over his face. "Well, I guess I wasn't the kind of a fellow one should resurrect; because the moment I got a chance, I slugged this guy who was dressing me, and I beat it to get out. I guess I wasn't in my right mind. Anyway, I stumbled into a great big empty room. God, it was awful. It was all done in black, and in one corner there was a shining glass coffin; just a dim blue light played down on it—"

Bud's eyes were staring wildly now, and he seemed scarcely aware that he was in the room at all.

"I went over to this coffin, and stared up at it. I saw her then." His voice broke. "I tell you, Brenda, I saw her. It was Hope. She was lying there in the coffin. She was a beautiful sight. But it was so hideous, so horrible— I watched, and I saw that she was breathing. Or maybe I just imagined it. I

thought I saw her stomach rise and fall—"

Brenda leaped to her feet. "Bud, I don't know what's happened to you. But whatever it is, it has affected your mind. You're insane!"

"You don't believe me?" he asked.

"How can I?"

His hands trembling, he jerked off the blue sweater. Brenda stared. She saw a tiny glass coffin. There were holes in the bottom of it, and through these it had been sewn in Bud's skin.

"There's a miniature of the coffin," he rasped. "You see it, don't you?"

"I . I—"

"You see it. I showed it to Peter Craig when I got out. I was scared. He told me he knew some tough guys at the Dead Rat; I could get a job until he could come back and take care of me. He said I should lay low. So I got out of Deauville and came back to Paris. I had to wait; I had to see you. I cabled—"

"Why didn't you go to the police?"

"What complaint would I make?

"Bud—" said Brenda, and stopped. His eyes were dead. His face was shrunken and hollow—a corpse-face half animated again.

That my life had been given back to me?"

"You could have told them about Hope."

"Yes; and be called a fool and a liar. The police in Deauville will not touch that château. They are afraid of it. And to try and convince them of my story would be a madman's futility. Even you doubt me. Even you think I am insane. What would the police do? They would call me dangerous and lock me up!"

"That glass coffin on your chest, Bud—"

"My mark; my brand. I am one of the living zombis, and I must wear this to signify the gratitude I owe to the master who restored me to the living." He gurgled with laughter. "This is a modern world, and I'm a Tin Pan Alley song writer, and here I am talking about having a master, and having crawled out of a coffin! Isn't it funny? Don't you want to laugh with me? Shall I tear this glass coffin off and show you what happens when I do?"

"No, Bud, *no*—"

"I'm going to; because I can't live like this. Maybe you're right. Maybe I am insane. Maybe it's a dream. Maybe I rhymed 'moon' with 'June' just once too often, and now I'm in the whacky ward at Bellevue and you're here to visit me—" He swayed. "Well, we shall see—and you will know whether I'm song-sappy or what. We shall tear off the coffin—"

"Bud—"

He tore at the tiny bit of glass on his chest, and it splintered. His finger bled; his chest welled with a drop of blood. Bud's mouth closed, and he sank to his knees.

Brenda screamed.

Bud Worth pitched forward, and was dead.

V

FRENCH music-hall melody. Old songs, popular here just now: "Body and Soul," "April in Paris"; the wheels of boule spinning; patrons in tuxedo and tails, evening gowns with glittering slippers, easy chatter and laughter; a juggler clown on the stage. Summer in Deauville.

Brenda sat at the long, polished oak bar, and by gazing into the mirror she could see the stage show. She was dressed in a white satin gown which was off the shoulders, and her shiny ebony hair was in an upswing coiffure. Her figure was breathless perfection against the tight material of the dress. She sipped at a Bacardi cocktail.

A man sat beside her. He was well built, like a swimmer, and he wore a cool tux. He had heavy, broad shoulders and a deeply tanned face. His hair was black and curly. He looked like a playboy who was here to have a very good time, and a casual passer-by would be amazed that he was not back playing roulette in the special rooms designed to deplete fortunes. The man had that reckless, devil-may-care air about him, and a friendly, boyish smile. And yet there was in his eyes a hardness you could not penetrate, and offhand you would probably say that you would rather engage almost anyone else in a fight. He sat there, toying with a pony of whiskey.

"Bud Worth told me quite a lot about you," he said.

"I was lucky to find you so soon," she replied.

"I'd be hard to miss." Peter Craig sighed, and he smiled grimly. "There was once a song the title of which was 'Time on My Hands'; well, I've been whistling it now for six weeks. And, believe it or not, getting paid for it. Of course, there's the beach, and the blondes. But if you swim much you haven't energy left for the blondes. And vice versa. It's a vicious circle."

"Haven't you tried to find out about my sister?"

"I'm always trying, but I haven't gotten far. The gendarmes have a complete answer for everything."

"But—"

"I know. I'm a private detective. I ought to have a little originality; a trick or two of my own. And I have. But I'm in somewhat of a situation. You see, my client is a Mr. Sadwin. A millionaire. He has employed me to investigate a Monsieur Roger Lackey."

"Isn't he the one—"

"Yes, he's the one. Mr. Sadwin is

his friend. But Sadwin keeps me away from Lackey. He says he wants me to stay here, and when he needs help he'll send for me. Meanwhile, he's given me strict orders to lay off Lackey. Not to go near him, nor to try to find out anything until the time comes."

"What time?"

"You've got *me*. I don't know."

"But—"

HE ORDERED another drink for both of them. "Oh, sure. I've found out a great deal about Roger Lackey in spite of myself. As Bud Worth told you, I was with Worth when he died; I saw him buried. And afterward I saw him when he was revived." He paused. "Perhaps the word is 'resurrected,' but it sounds so incredible I hate to use it."

"Do you think Bud's mind was affected? Do you think he imagined some of those things?"

"No. Strangely enough, I believe everything he said."

Her voice caught: "Then why don't you break away from your Mr. Sadwin and do something? Do you need the money so badly that—"

"Please," he said, and his voice was rich and pleasant. "It's not so easy as it sounds. In the first place that château is impregnable. Bud Worth got out only because they were willing to release him. The walls are charged with electricity. It's next to impossible to get in."

"I see."

"If you stop Lackey on the street," Peter Craig went on, "what can you say to him? He is protected by the law; he would laugh at you."

"But what in the world is going on?"

"I don't know," Craig said slowly. "I've never in my life run into anything that was like it. It—" He paused. "Did I tell you? Monsieur Lackey does not seem to be a human being. Please laugh as I tell you this. I'd feel saner if you do. Monsieur Lackey looks exactly like the Devil."

"I've heard that."

"He's got a walk, the sound of which you'd swear was cloven hoofs."

She was silent.

Craig took down his drink. "Do you believe in the supernatural?"

"No."

"Nor do I, but—do you believe that which you see?"

"Oh, don't talk like this!"

"You wanted to know all about it. It's only fair that you know the worst part."

Brenda said: "I want my sister more than anything else! He can't hold her there like that. Don't you realize Monsieur Lackey must be a murderer? Bud Worth is dead, and—"

"But Worth died naturally; what testimonial there was that he lived *afterwards*, would be laugh at."

"Don't you want to help me?" Brenda pleaded. "I thought that *you* would be the one person—" Tears sprang into her eyes, and she slid off the stool. The band had struck up a martial air; it swung into a wild melody and six cancan dancers came onto the stage, kicking up their pretty legs. Brenda in the tight white gown moved quickly for the stairway. Her slim shoulders were bare; her hair was stunning.

Craig caught up. "Where are you going?"

"To that château."

"But why? What can you do?"

"I don't know. I can't accept your glib excuse that it is impossible to get in. I will go there and ask for Monsieur Lackey—"

She was hurrying down the stairs, and now the doorman held open the glass doors.

Craig followed her outside.

"Since you insist on going, we'll take my car," he said.

THEY PARKED in front of the château. Brenda stared up at it, and

shuddered; she got out of the car, and walked around, searching for the gate. She found it, but there were huge padlocks on it, and a sign which warned in French: "Do not touch; danger of death."

"But do they let them do that in France?"

Craig nodded.

They walked around on the outside of the huge iron fence. Wind whispered about the château; waves pounded on the beach. Suddenly they came upon a lump which lay beside the fence. Brenda bent down. It was a dog which had freshly been killed. She did not touch it. It had been electrocuted.

"You see?" Craig said softly.

She rose, and there were tears in her eyes.

"Hades with a fence around it," Craig went on. He took Brenda's shoulders. "But we'll find a way." His face was tight, and his jaw had snapped shut. "There's more than one way of getting into hell," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I can die," he whispered.

VI.

SHE DID NOT at once make a reply, and they got back in the car. She stared bleakly at the château as they drove away. The sight of it struck terror in her heart, but at the same time it was a challenge. All of her life had changed. A short ten days ago she had been singing ballads in an off-Broadway joint; the racing sports, the gamblers, the bookies, the chorus girls—they had all been a part of her life; existence had been a thing through which you chopped with a hatchet, and at last got somewhere. But she had not dreamed that she would come to France; that she would be told her sister's breathing body reposed in a glass coffin, and that she would speak soberly of a man who might not be a man, but the Devil. Nor had she dreamed that quite suddenly she would be riding in an automobile with a tan, curly-haired young man who looked like a playboy, but was, instead, a private detective. She heard the hum of the car's wheels, and she looked bleakly at the little lighted signs, and the streets that they passed. At last she spoke.

"You were joking, of course."

"About what?" he asked.

"About dying and going to hell."

"Not at all."

She looked up quickly. "One doesn't ust die. One—"

"Look at the facts," he said. "Bud Worth was around asking a lot of embarrassing questions about what had happened to your sister Hope. Bud pestered everybody in Deauville about it, and twice went to the French police. Then, quite suddenly, he began having headaches and queer heart attacks which could not be correctly diagnosed."

"You mean you think he was murdered?"

"I think that in one way or another Lackey killed him. Don't ask me to explain. At this point I can't. Maybe Lackey just looked at him, and Bud began to feel sick; most probably not. Anyhow, Bud died. He was a lad too curious for his own good. Later his coffin was dug up—and you know the rest."

For a moment she was too frightened to think. "You aren't considering—"

"I'm considering getting curious like Bud did. Maybe I'll have those headaches then, and the heart attacks—"

"But you can't!"

"I have to get into that château somehow, don't I? That seems to be one sure way. It's all right to die if you're brought to life again."

"But how could you be sure you'd be brought to life?"

"I could have my client, Mr. Sadwin, insist that Lackey perform the feat."

"Yes, but Mr. Sadwin has ordered

you away from Monsieur Lackey. He'd never agree."

Peter Craig was silent for a moment. "In that you have a point," he admitted. "Otherwise, it's a perfect plan. I'm sure Lackey doesn't suspect me as a detective." He paused. "I know! I don't have to tell Mr. Sadwin what I'm doing. He can think I died naturally. I'm sure that he's sufficiently fond of me to ask Lackey to restore my life."

"Is Mr. Sadwin familiar with resurrection business?"

"He's only heard of it so far. It's just been talk. *I* saw Bud buried, though."

"Perhaps it wasn't Bud."

"It was he all right. Well, what do you think of my plan?"

"Of dying? Oh, it's impossible," she said, "it's wild. You can't do it."

"I'm going to."

"You *aren't!*"

"Does it matter?"

"And have you weak? Have you half out of your mind? Have you go through life wearing a glass coffin sewed to your chest, Peter oh, no!"

"You know something, Brenda?"

"What?"

"You called me by my first name."

"Did I . . I—" She stared into his face. He slipped his arm about her, and they drove on.

"Promise me you won't try that desperate plan. There'll be other ways."

"But I've waited for other ways, other leads or breaks; but none have come," he said.

"But please please don't try anything so dangerous as to risk getting murdered the way Bud did."

He became silent, and she was afraid to speak to him of it further; it was a plan so utterly preposterous that she was sure he would dismiss it. A man could go through a case and *risk* his life, but he did not *give* it on the single chance that consciousness would be restored to him inside a house he wished to enter. She looked up into his face, with the moonlight like ivory on it, and she felt her heart flutter within her until it hurt.

It was late, and he was driving her to her hotel.

PETER CRAIG returned to the casino alone. He walked up the steps, and strode to the bar. He stood there and held up two fingers, and said: "Whiskey." The bartender poured two ponies of whiskey and looked around to see who else was going to drink. But Craig put one pony in front of himself, and the other in front of a vacant place, and then he bowed and toasted someone who was not there.

"To you, Brenda," he said. "You of the dark eyes, and the ebony hair, and the voice which is like magic. I didn't know Peter Craig was capable of getting dizzy and whirling like this, like a waltzing mouse, and I salute your grace and charm."

He drank. He exchanged the empty pony for the full one and toasted once again.

"If I do things I would never do were I sane, it is because of you, Brenda." He bowed to the emptiness. "If I die because of the things I shall start saying tonight, and I go to heaven, then that will be sad because you will still be here on earth. But if I go to hell . . ah, this is my mission."

He took down the second drink.

He walked over to the boule tables; he pulled back a chair and sat down, and he threw a hundred-franc note on No. 5. He rubbed his hand down across his face and stared at the whirling red disk. It stopped on No. 3. He threw another hundred-franc note on 5, and watched once more as the disk rolled. People were staring at him; the croupiers were sitting up a little straighter. This was nothing compared to what went on inside, but out here it was like betting your right arm. No. 9 lay under the

red ball when it stopped. Craig was testing his luck. He believed in silly, foolish things like that. He wanted to know his chances in the beginning. He played 5 once more, doubling his bet. As he sat there the music crashed, the stage show went on endlessly; a girl in tights was riding a six-foot bicycle around and around in a circle.

Around and around, Craig thought, and the little ball suddenly stopped. No. 2. Craig tripled his bet, and sat there. He had begun to sweat.

Ten minutes later his pockets were empty, and he declined the kind offer of credit with a little smile.

"No," he said, "I'm not here to gamble. I'm here to find a Monsieur Lackey and to ask him what ever became of Mademoiselle Manners."

"Mademoiselle Manners, sir?"

"Yes. The girl with the golden hair and the lovely body. I want to know if she really drowned, or if she is in a glass coffin somewhere. You see, I want to know if she's a m'selle from Hell!"

Several Frenchmen turned around and stared.

Peter Craig rocked back on his heels. It was done, it was over; he had started the fatal questioning. He would keep it up now. His luck had been bad at the wheel; but it didn't mean anything. Maybe he threw salt over his left shoulder when he spilled it, but he really didn't believe in that stuff; three-on-a-match was hokum for fools. He'd prove it. He'd take their credit for a mille note and play it on No. 5. He turned to the head croupier and told him that he wanted the money. He got it at once, and he strode back to the table and placed the bill on No. 5.

The red ball tripping over the spinning wheel stopped on No. 8.

VII.

"A ROOM in view of the casino—"

It was a small room on the second floor of the De Phane Hotel, and the fare included meals. There was in the room a four-poster bed, a screen which stood in front of a washbasin, and very little else. There were no rooms in this hotel that included bath. Just below Brenda's window there was the sound of a radio coming from the hotel's bar. Across the street stood a travel bureau, the name of which was De Phane Service De Luxe, and alongside it was the De Phane Garage.

"M'selle," Mr. de Phane had assured her, "I own practically the whole block. In the winter I would sell it to you for three francs, the hotel and all. But in the summer"—he kissed his fingers and waved them in the air—"in the summer, m'selle, seventy francs a day with meals is as low as I can make it. But for you, I will make it forty francs a day!"

That was about a dollar and a quarter a day.

Brenda closed and bolted the door now, and walked across to the slightly warped mirror. She unsnapped the dress, and pulled it off. She stood there garbed in thin white undies, which she quickly discarded. She took a nightgown from her suitcase, and put it on. She turned down the sheets and climbed into bed. She was very tired from the long trip, and she wanted time to collect her thoughts. It was difficult for her to believe that in surroundings of such gaiety any of this was happening. She turned off the lights and closed her eyes and pretended that she was a little girl again, and there were no worries except the chores her mother wanted her to do, and her big sister Hope's occasional teasing—

She dozed off, and she did not know how long she slept. But when she awakened she felt the presence of someone in the room. There was nothing but darkness. The sound of the radio no longer came from below. It must have been three in the morning. She reached

for the lights, and snapped the switch; but no lights went on. She wanted to scream but her throat was paralyzed.

She lay there very still, listening intently for sound. She heard the loud thumping of her heart, and she dared to scarcely breathe. She lay rigid with terror. A hundred things flashed through her mind: *Leap from bed and get out the door;* but she was shaking with fear and powerless to move. *Call out and ask who it is.* But she had no voice. She waited. Minutes went by without a sound. She gained a shred of courage; and then, in the blue light of night, her eyes were gradually becoming accustomed to darkness, and she saw a form there between the bed and the window. It disappeared as it came deeper into the room, and closer to her. Brenda was ice-cold. Terror gripped her.

She felt something touch the bed. She stared up, and faintly she saw the form of a man, bending over the bed. A hand touched her shoulder. It was a heavy, cold hand.

In panic then, she found voice. She shrieked.

The hand was withdrawn.

BRENDA tumbled out on the other side of the bed. She heard the footsteps pounding toward her, and she stumbled back against the washbowl. She reached up and tore the mirror off the wall. As the man approached, she hurled it at what she believed would be his head.

There was a terrible crash. Brenda tried to run past the man then, but he reached out and grabbed her. She fought with him, pounding her fists against his chest. But he held her tightly around the waist, and all of her fighting did no good.

"Spit cat," he hissed, "do you want to see your sister?"

"Of course."

"I'm going to take you to her."

"No," she said, "I—"

"You're going to her!"

"No—"

Brenda started fighting again. She writhed to get out of his grasp. The man held to her thin nightgown, and it tore in shreds and hung against her lovely white body. She ran to the door and unbolted it. But he was right behind her. She turned and pounded at him.

Just then there was a sound of running feet in the hall. Someone pounded on the door, and Mr. de Phane's thick voice demanded:

"Ouvrez! Ouvrez! Attendez!"

The man released Brenda and leaped back. In the next instant he was simply gone, how or where she could not know.

Brenda opened the door.

"Ah, it is you, M'selle American. *Ou est*—where are the lights?"

"I think the wires have been cut."

"Impossible! Ah, the bulbs, they were unscrewed."

He turned on the lights and stared at her. Brenda picked up the white dress and held it over her nude body.

"Well, what happened here? What goes on? You entertain, yes? Then you must do it with more dignity. We in France do not make love so noisily."

"You fool," she said, "I I was almost killed. Please get a gendarme."

"Ah, but ah, yes. *Oui, oui, oui.*" He hurried out.

There were people standing in the hall who had also heard her scream. The walls were by no means soundproof. Brenda closed the door, then she began getting dressed. Somehow, Monsieur Lackey had discovered she was Hope's sister, and that she was in town; he had sent a henchman to get her. Brenda would have to pack at once. She would have to move secretly, to where Lackey couldn't find her.

The experience left her cold and trembling. None of the things which had

happened here had by any means been imagined.

THAT NIGHT she sat at the bar in the casino with Peter Craig.

"So as soon as the gendarme had finished asking questions, I had him come with me for protection. We got a cab, and left Deauville. I had the driver go all around Trouville, until I was sure we weren't followed. And then to be absolutely safe I asked the gendarme to also get out, which he did. He couldn't speak English, and without De Phane there to interpret I am sure he must have been miserable trying to talk to me. I had the cab drive around quite awhile longer, until I found a hotel and a room."

"Very wise," Craig said. "You would have ended up in a glass coffin with or alongside your sister. That man Lackey—*if* he *is* a man—must be desperate."

"But we're no closer to him than we were before," Brenda said. "Perhaps . . . perhaps I should have gone."

Craig shook his head. "If you ever go, you want to go armed. There's a sea wall behind the château; yet I suppose if one came through and around it in a boat, there would be a way of preventing entrance there also. They're taking no chances. As I said last night, there's one sure ticket to get in, and just that—"

"You're not still thinking of that?"

"No, of course not." He ordered a double brandy. "But my head; it throbs terribly tonight; it is as though my temples are exploding."

"Pete—"

"Did I tell you," he went on hurriedly, "I ran into Lackey here in the casino tonight?"

The bartender put down the drink, and Craig drank it.

"Come on," he said; "come on, Brenda. Let's watch the show."

His words seemed to come slowly, as though one stumbled over the other. He got down off the stool. She held onto his trembling hand; and then, suddenly, he collapsed. He fell into a heap there on the floor. A cry broke from Brenda's lips, and she knelt quickly. When she looked up a man with a narrow face, and dark flaming eyes, and a pointed chin stood there. He was tall, and he wore a heavy black cape. His gaze was almost hypnotic, and he was staring into her eyes. She felt weak.

In the next moment people came on the run to the unconscious Peter Craig, and the man in the cape vanished in the surge of the crowd. Yet even as the people gathered, babbling and talking, Brenda thought she heard the *tap-tap-tap* that was like cloven hoofs, as they moved off through the casino.

VIII.

THEY had brought Peter Craig to his room. Brenda sat on one side of the bed now, and a doctor on the other.

"He is in a very grave condition," the doctor said.

"But is there nothing you can do?"

"Not much, I'm afraid."

The handsome young man tossed restlessly on the bed; his face had turned an ashen color, and his eyes seemed to be sunk back in their sockets. He stared, as though he recognized nothing he saw; sweat dripped from his cheeks; he had difficulty breathing.

"Brenda," he whispered.

"Yes . . . Pete—"

"Brenda, I'm going to hell—" and he tried to laugh.

"Yes, Pete. But you shouldn't have done—"

"Make sure I get to hell, won't you?"

"I'll do everything I can—"

"You know, it's for you I'm doing this—"

"I know," she said.

"Suffering weakens whatever little nobility there is in you," he went on, "and

I didn't mean to tell you until afterward—*if* there is an afterward—"

"Tell me what?"

"That I love you; that there's never been—" He choked, and he could not go on; there seemed to be a dry choking in his throat. His eyelids fluttered, and then his eyes closed. His body still twitched and moved. The blood was coming into his face now, making it bluish.

"Heart reaction," murmured the doctor, and he shot an injection into Craig's arm. The blue drained from the face at once, and Pete seemed to calm down a little. But ten minutes later he stopped breathing entirely. Brenda stared with horror, and the doctor got to his feet.

"It's all over now," he said.

"You mean he's dead?"

"Oui, m'selle. Il est tres mort."

The doctor went to the dresser and filled out the death certificate. Brenda put her ear to Pete's heart. There was no sound. She sat there, rigid and staring. The room was very quiet, and there was only the scratching of the doctor's pen.

THE NEXT afternoon Brenda stopped in front of the drab little funeral parlor in Trouville. Laughing boys in white ducks brushed past her; women in wet bathing suits walked by; kids went screaming along. The traffic was thick, the sun was hot; the gendarme's whistle blew to stop the flow of cars. Striped tents stood on the beach, and pretty girls in one-piece bathing suits paraded around. Merchants worked in their shops, folding their hands and bowing as customers came in: *"Bon jour, messieurs, mesdames—"* But Brenda stood here in front of the bleak little funeral parlor. At last she went in.

"The young man who was brought in last night. Is he here?"

"Comprendez-vous Français, m'selle?"

She tried to explain the best she could. The despairing undertaker at last graciously showed her all his corpses. There were three, two old women and Pete. He lay stretched out in a coffin, his hands folded over his chest, his face chalk-white with powder, and his eyes closed. Brenda stood there and looked down.

"Votre frere, m'selle?"

Her head came up. "You don't embalm people here in France, you don't—"

The undertaker rubbed his hands together. *"Non. Non, non, non—"*

She nodded. "When is the burial?"

"Comment?"

"The burial." Her hands were heavy, and her arms ached with the despair that pulsed through her, but she made the motion of working with a spade.

"Ah, oui!" exclaimed the bright Frenchman.

"Well, when is it?"

"Comment?"

Unable to make him understand what she wanted to know, she gave up. She walked outside. The sun was beating down, and on the beach the waves crashed and frothed white as they slid up on the sand. People were swimming and laughing.

SHE RETURNED the next morning. Peter Craig still lay reposed in the coffin. Brenda was desperate. She was sure that if something was to be done it should happen at once. She had already informed Mr. Sadwin—through his secretary—of Pete's death. Yet nothing had been done. The corpse of the detective lay there exactly as it had yesterday.

Brenda walked the streets of Trouville. She was scarcely conscious of anything about her; she walked steadily, hearing the sounds of the street, seeing the sights that were there for her to see, yet her eyes were blind to these things, and her ears deaf. Fever lived and beat in her heart; and there jumped in

her pulse the desire to strike back at the very devil himself, if he were a devil. Her own safety was not to be considered. Peril was a toy word which she cast aside, and her desperate mind reconstructed the whole scene, and saw it differently now: saw it through shining eyes which no longer cared what the consequences might be.

Perhaps it was impossible to get into the château by boat; but if one were a good swimmer, and could dive under the sea wall, could swim deeply enough to get to the bottom of it, and come up on the other side— She did not know what she would find. It was not a sure way of doing the thing, as Pete Craig had thought his way was; but it was a chance, and that's what she was going to take.

With darkness she would start. There was nothing to hold her back now. She would strike as well as she could for her sister and for Pete Craig.

She walked faster, and people swirled around her, jabbering French. People in a hurry to go swimming, or to return; horse-drawn carts clattered by. Brenda Manners kept walking, steadily.

IX.

MR. WINTHROP SADWIN told himself that sixty-one was by no means old age. Indeed, he looked scarcely fifty.

He was a plump man, with a ruddy, good-natured face, and pleasant gray eyes; he was retired from business, that was true. He had made his five millions, and it was time he got out and let someone else in. But to consider that retirement and the age of sixty-one were the beginning of disintegration and rot was pure poppycock. He was mentally alert. If he hadn't been "the wolf of Wall Street"—that antiquated, overused and entirely stale phrase once dedicated to predepression tycoons—he was, at least, "the fox of Fifth Avenue"; and he had by no means discarded the adding-machine mind, even though he no longer employed it in the talent of transforming five-spots into mille notes. The point was, he told himself, that senility had by no means set in like a flock of grasshoppers to eat away his valuable brain.

And yet when he carefully regarded every aspect of Monsieur Roger Lackey, he wondered.

He would sit in his five-room suite in Deauville's best hotel, drinking champagne, and looking out over the ocean, and he would put Lackey up on a revolving pedestal in his mind. He would turn him one way and then the other and inspect him from each different direction, and whenever Mr. Sadwin did this he would argue with himself until he was blue in the diaphragm.

When he was at last exhausted with mechanical observation, he would start remembering the words that had come from Monsieur Lackey's thin lips. He would repeat the words aloud. He would listen to the sound of them. He would dissect the phrases and look for double and triple meanings. Mr. Sadwin had, perhaps, contended with more than his share of clever swindlers in his day. He had seen through the biggest Wall Street frauds long before the law ever overtook them. And yet he did not know about Monsieur Lackey. The whole distressing circumstance was that Monsieur Lackey did not represent himself as being anyone other than an ordinary Frenchman. The very unpretentiousness of this was laughable; but you certainly could not accuse of fraud a man who never pretended to be any more than common.

The thing that Mr. Sadwin asked himself—insisting upon his sanity—was whether or not Monsieur Roger Lackey was even a mortal man.

Sadwin had brought Peter Craig to France to investigate Lackey, but fear kept him from allowing Craig to go near

Lackey. The more Sadwin saw of the Frenchman, the more he gradually became convinced that there was a sphere beyond this earth from which occasional evil spirits might descend—or ascend. It was hysterical spookism of which he had never had truck, and yet when you saw your hand before you and you counted five fingers on it, you were inclined to believe there were five fingers. If a sixth one sprouted and you saw it grow, you might not believe it at first, but as it grew, and you saw it there, you eventually would have to accept that which you had heretofore been unable to believe or comprehend.

But Roger Lackey never once inferred that he might be the Devil. Mr. Sadwin therefore could not very easily make him out a fraud by exposing that he was really not Satan at all. Anyway, the idea that Lackey was the Devil was Sadwin's own. He was in the self-embarrassing position of half thinking the man was a fraud for not being what he thought him.

Strangely enough, the rich old gentleman—Old? Who in hell said old?—took to reading "Faust" with deep and profound respect—and a secret but firm belief that every word of it was true. When he was a little boy under ten years of age he had believed that brownies lived in the cracks in the wall—actually they were only cockroaches. But this was different. Faust made a deal with the Devil. Of course, Sadwin was no Faust. He was a clever businessman, but by no means a sage, and the years did not hang so heavily on his fairly plump shoulders.

However, there was trouble with Sadwin's heart—which was a disease he had dreaded since he was a young man of twenty-five; and he scarcely ever picked up a paper but what he saw a list of names on the obituary page, with ages like fifty-five, sixty-two, fifty-nine, and the reason specified as "coronary thrombosis." Sometimes Mr. Sadwin would imagine his own name thus listed, and during moments like these he would sit back uncomfortably and contemplate his own funeral, with the widow in black, and his children quite respectful, but a trifle more eager to take a first look at the will than to take a last look at pater, poor old fellow. And then Sadwin would go right on through the rigmarole, into the coffin, down into the ground—and sometimes he would even think about the worms crawling in and out of his nose and tickling his upper lip.

Sadwin was in a frame of mind to make a deal with the Devil, even though Satan thought it best not to announce himself by that stately title.

MR. SADWIN sat on the terrace of his suite now, in view of the ocean, and glanced at his watch. It was time that Roger Lackey arrived.

It was time for a showdown, and Sadwin was rather cool, contemplating how he would handle Lackey today. But the moment the bell tinkled, and he knew who his visitor must be, panic fell like ice cubes into his plump stomach, and the dry paper of his cigar rattled in his hand, spraying him with ashes. He got to his feet and walked in through the living room to the door.

Monsieur Roger Lackey stood there in the hall, and though it was an incredibly light day, there seemed to be a shadow hanging about him. He stepped in, and Mr. Sadwin saw for the first time that Lackey's shiny leather shoes was as high in the heels as boots. Lackey turned; he shrugged the cape from his shoulders. His face was dark-complexioned, but it was as though he had recently shaved it, for it was grayish-white with powder. It did not seem quite real. It was as though the skin might dissolve at any moment and leave only the bony skull with the sharp chin and the high cheekbones. The eyebrows were thin, but they did not slant according to the popular version. You could never point

The dead body over his shoulder, Lackey grinned back at Sadwin: "Are you coming with me?"

your finger at the man and say that he was deliberately making up to look like Satan. He was entirely natural—for him. Mr. Sadwin also noted, with some satisfaction, that there was nothing that might be construed as horns or the beginning of such. Just the sleek, tight black hair, drawing a V from the mid-

dle of the forehead. It was, after all perhaps, Sadwin admitted with reservation, senility which had caused him to suspect this man as immortal.

"Monsieur Sadwin. My greetings!"

"Same here," said Sadwin.

"Do I presume too much by expecting you are ready to deal with me?"

"No, but"—the American grinned—"as man to man, Lackey, you *know* it's impossible to bring the dead back to life."

"As man to *man?*"

Sadwin choked on cigar smoke.

Lackey's face was sleek. "Ah, yes, I see now. Your terminology confused me."

But Sadwin still shook.

Monsieur Lackey waited. "Well m'sieur?"

Mr. Winthrop Sadwin looked up. "Regardless of your undoubted genius, sir, don't you think it is expecting too much of me to believe you can restore life to the dead without my having seen you do it?"

"Quite. And I am prepared to make a demonstration." He extended a French paper. "There are three burials today. Choose your corpse and we will dig it up shortly after the funeral."

Sadwin was not quite ready for complete acceptance, and his mouth fell slightly agape. He ran his eyes down the list of names. "I am interested in none of these people. But a friend of mine has recently died; he's not listed here. I suggest you resurrect him, if you can."

"I must not only demonstrate," Monsieur Lackey said acidly, "but I must perform for you a personal favor."

"I'm willing to pay any expenses there might be," Sadwin said hurriedly.

"Very well. Who is this friend?"

"Peter Craig, an American. He's to be buried this afternoon."

Monsieur Roger Lackey bowed. *"Tres bien. C'est comme vous dites, m'sieur."*

WHEN the pair arrived at the graveyard the coffin was already being lowered into the ground. It was a barren and ugly burial place, and only a small knot of people stood around, all of them obviously poor. Only one wept, and she was an old woman who stood back by a tree and daubed her eyes with the hem of her skirt.

Monsieur Lackey stood, tall and straight, with one foot in front of another, and seemed a little impatient; the rotund Mr. Sadwin stood with his hat in his hand and tried to appear as reverent as possible. The earth began to fall on the coffin and all of the people went away except the man with the spade throwing on the dirt, and the old woman by the tree.

"Perhaps she is related to him," Lackey suggested. "I will approach her."

He walked up to the miserable and sobbing old woman. "Pardon, madame. Is it that the boy they have just put in the ground is related to you?"

"No," she said, "I do not know who he is."

"Then why do you stand and snivel?"

"I come every day," she said, "when there is a burial. It gives one such a great emotional washing to watch. As for the boy, he was a stranger."

"I see, madame. May it be that you will enjoy many other emotional purges before the day when others will stand by and watch you go into the hole."

"Curse you, sir! Curse you roundly!"

Monsieur Lackey had turned to go, but he whirled around now and faced the woman, towering over her; the afternoon light fell against his face, and his thin upper lip quivered against the white of his teeth; his eyes were flames of anger. The woman gaped up at him, and then she let out a chilling shriek. Screams broke from her throat in a great sobbing series, and she fell upon the ground, groveling, but screaming still.

When Monsieur Lackey strode away she remained there, whimpering loudly and crossing herself.

AFTER Peter Craig was buried they bribed the caretaker to sell them the corpse; and a few minutes later the grumbling spademan was digging into the fresh earth and taking it out of the grave.

Mr. Sadwin stood gaping as the coffin was brought back up to the surface of the ground. Monsieur Lackey stood looking down at it, a thin sheen of sweat on his sleek face. He rubbed his long-long-fingered hands together and spoke without looking up.

"It would be awkward to take him in the coffin. We shall leave the box here and simply put him in the back seat of your car."

"Are you are you talking about the corpse?"

"Why, of course."

The coffin was opened. Peter Craig lay there, his face white, and his arms crossed; his hands were clasped on his stomach. The skin of his cheeks was sunken, and his closed eyes seemed to be deeper in the skull.

Monsieur Roger Lackey stooped down and picked up the corpse and threw it over his shoulder. The caretaker believed the body was going to be used for medical experiments, and he saw nothing unusual in the procedure. But Sadwin was shivering.

The body over his shoulder, arms hanging downward, Monsieur Lackey turned back.

"Are you coming with me?"

X.

THE BARE WALLS of the room oppressed Brenda, and through the open window the night seemed bleak and void; for her it was without the magic of music or life, for there was in her only one driving purpose, and it consumed all of her energy and thought. She was garbed in a thin white linen suit which would dry quickly; and now she slipped an automatic she had just today purchased into a rubber water-tight container. She put this under her arm, like a purse, and then she gazed up in the mirror at herself. She had intended to say something apropos of the drama which beat in her heart, but no words came, either to her mind or from her lips, and she turned at last and went to the door.

She walked down the stairs to the street, and there was a cab at the curb. She got in and gave the driver the name of a street in Deauville which was only a block from the château of Monsieur Lackey. She sat back, counting her heartbeat, unable to think farther than the present; she did not know what the night held in store for her and she did not try to guess.

The cab drove for fifteen minutes and stopped. She climbed out and paid the driver. The taxi left at once, and she was alone there, the wind whipping against her body and blowing through her ebony hair. She walked in the direction of the beach, and her feet sloshed through the white, deserted sand. She wore light cork sandals, and when she arrived at the edge of the water she did not try to keep from getting wet. She walked along the beach toward the château and the high stone wall which guarded an entrance to it from the sea. The wall extended out into the ocean like a U; but across the mouth of the U there must have been a wire netting to keep out boats. She did not intend to find out.

The night was cold and dark, and the stars seemed terribly distant. When she neared the château she stood up and looked up at it, the windows and the turrets; and then she turned and walked out into the ocean, holding the rubber pouch with the gun. A wave crashed

against her, and an instant later she was swimming.

She swam beyond the break of the waves, and then veered. She headed for the wall in a breast stroke. The surf smacked along the wall, shooting white spray ten feet high. It looked ugly and treacherous, but she kept moving toward it.

When she was within seven feet she dove and went under. She opened her eyes, but they only stung, and she could see nothing. She swam downward, in the breast stroke, slanting toward the wall. She reached out and felt the wall. There seemed to be no bottom to it. She forced her body down, until her lungs were bursting, and then all at once she touched bottom. She kicked out, as she began to come up, and the truth jarred her with the kick.

The wall was embedded into the floor of the ocean. There was no way of getting under it.

She popped to the surface, gasping for breath. She looked around, treading while she regained her strength. She could not go back now, and there was only one apparent thing left to try. She swam outward, in the direction of the place where the wall ended. It lay almost fifty yards ahead, and she was bucking current now; an undercurrent that pulled at her legs, helping her swim, but tugging to draw her under.

She fought through the water. The end of the wall was thick was barnacles, and as she had expected, a wire netting extended across the mouth of it, from one wall to the other. She swam out and toward the mouth of the U. She treaded, and gazed at the complex network of wire.

It seemed to her that such protection could not be constantly kept in repair, and that the toil of the sea might eventually partially wreck it. If there were a "chink" somewhere in the impregnable armor, that was all she would need. A hole through which she might squeeze.

SHE MOVED closer to the wire netting and inspected it; waves bashed against her, shoving her into the wire, and twice she fought clear. There was apparently no break. She dove under, opened her eyes again, but could see nothing. She felt along the wire for an opening.

Then suddenly a swift tide of current swept inward; she was brushed into the net, like a fish caught in a trap. Her leg became tangled in the wire, and she could not get it free. She pulled, and then her arm was caught. She was held there, under water. Her lungs became swollen; her face was blue. She struggled desperately.

The swift cold current kept sweeping inward with tremendous force; and in a last desperate writhe, she swung herself *with* instead of against it; she hurled her body against the very net in which she had been caught. Her energy combined with the current that shoved against her snapped the wire like tautly stretched thread. She went tumbling through, and in the next instant she was struggling to get to the surface.

She came up, gasping and wheezing. She felt faint. It was all she could do to tread water and regain her breath.

She was inside the barriers now. But with that undercurrent coming in the way it was, there was no way in the world in which she could get out; she had washed out her bridges behind her.

Somehow, she still gripped the pouch with the gun.

In a few minutes she was strong enough to start swimming. She swam toward the back of the château, and the landing of its porch. The closer she drew, the more frightened she became. The whole plan seemed to her incredibly desperate, and yet it had been her single recourse.

At last she climbed up on the tiled porch of the château. It was cast in a gloom of total darkness, and she lay there panting for her breath. Water

dripped from her, and the white linen was like rubber against her lithe body.

In a few minutes she got to her feet. French doors faced the tiled landing, and she moved quietly toward them. Her hands were fairly dry now, and she opened the pouch and withdrew the automatic; she dropped the pouch, and tried the handle of one of the doors. It was locked. She went along trying all of the handles. No luck.

She paced from one end of the landing to the other. The only entrance was through the locked doors. She moved up to the first one, held the butt of the gun steadily and cracked as quietly as she could against the glass. When it splintered she tried to hold it so that it would not fall. Two pieces escaped her. But she had made a hole in the glass, and now she reached in and opened the door.

SHE ENTERED the room at once, closing the door. She stood there on a deep, plush rug, breathing softly, listening for sound. She held the gun steadily in her right hand now. Presently she began to move forward.

But she stopped. A low, terrifying moan swept through the house. She could not tell from where it had come, or whether it was a man or a woman. She listened. The moan came a second time, like the hum of the wind; but it was human, and there was terror in it.

The moan sounded louder and broke into a soft, whimpering cry. It was feminine. She could tell now. Then her heart froze. It sounded like Hope. She began walking slowly forward, trying to discern from which direction the sound had come.

Then suddenly there was the shape of a man before her. She stooped, holding her breath. The shape moved forward and walked past. She could hear the swish of trousers. The man moved about the dark room, as though looking for someone. The moan that had sounded before came again, and the figure of the man seemed to pay no attention.

Brenda watched, and her heart beat very fast. She saw the man go near a table, and she realized there must have been a lamp on it. He was going to turn on the lights. She got up and rushed toward him, silently, on tiptoe.

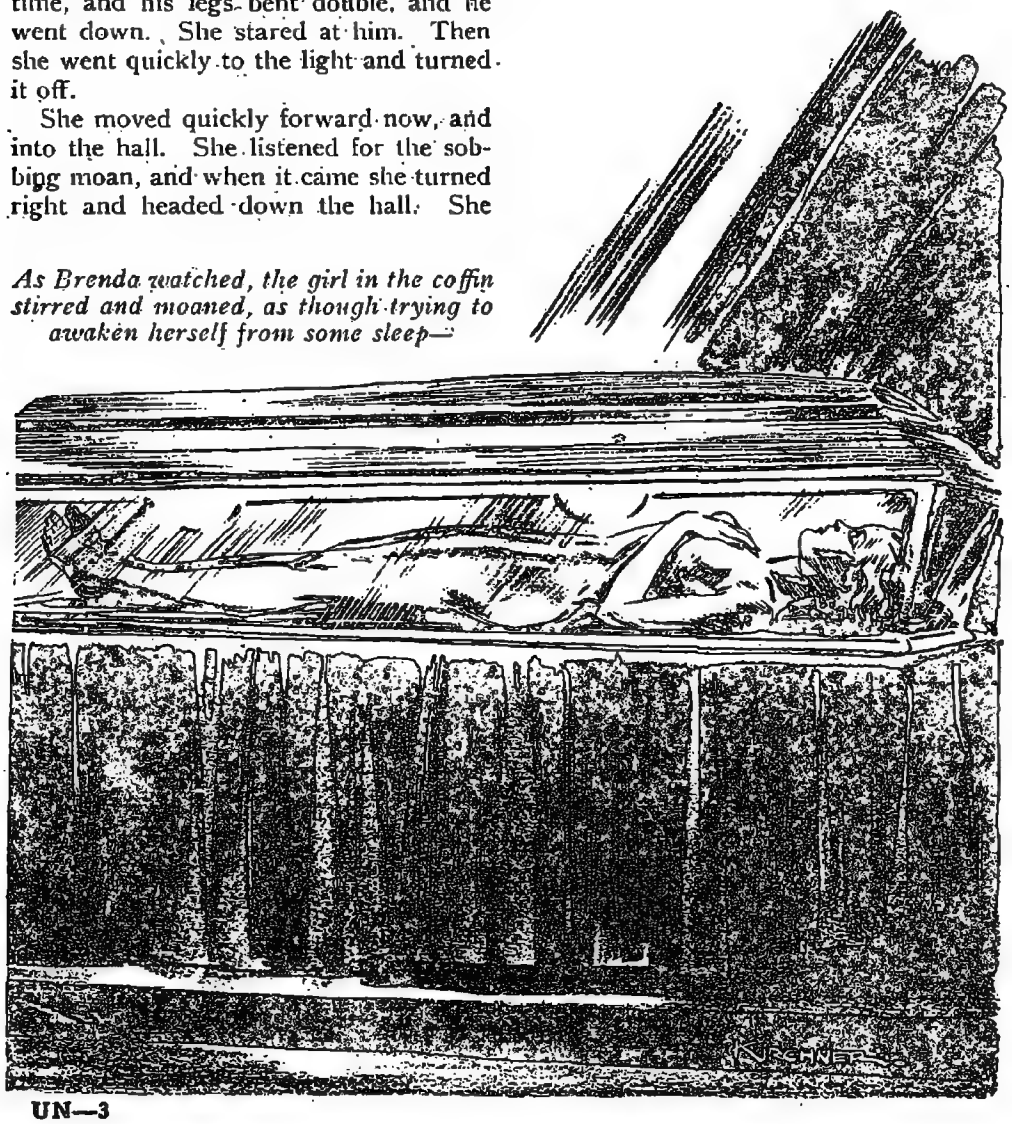
The light came on. The man turned. He was huge, with long arms and a low forehead; his eyes glittered, small and black. He saw her, opened his mouth to speak, then reached out at her.

Brenda brought the gun up and hit him just above the nose. She stepped back, and he plunged at her. She hit him with the butt of the gun once again, this time on the forehead. The skin split and blood came. He stopped and seemed to be dazed. Brenda hit him for a third time, and his legs bent double, and he went down. She stared at him. Then she went quickly to the light and turned it off.

She moved quickly forward now, and into the hall. She listened for the sobbing moan, and when it came she turned right and headed down the hall. She passed through a small antechamber, and then into a large room done in black, and as she entered, Bud Worth's description seemed to come back to her ears. There at the end of it, with lights streaming down and shining against the glossy surface, stood the glass coffin, and in it there was the supine and naked body of a girl.

Incredulously, Brenda moved toward it. She saw now that it was Hope. Her golden hair was spread out gloriously,

As Brenda watched, the girl in the coffin stirred and moaned, as though trying to awaken herself from some sleep—



and her face was delicate and beautiful, exactly like carved wax; her white body was gorgeous under the light, and Brenda saw that Hope breathed. There were air slits along the top of the coffin.

Just then Hope's lips moved, and the moan sobbed from her throat. Her arm moved; her body twitched. She stirred, as though trying to awaken herself.

Suddenly Brenda heard voices, and she stiffened. The gun tight in her hand, she moved in the direction of the sound—

XI.

MR. WINTHROP SADWIN thought that Monsieur Roger Lackey looked a great deal more like Satan under the electric lights of night. He waited in the front room, and Lackey entered now, tall and gaunt, a little smile tugging at the corners of his thin lips, amused gleaming in his dark eyes.

"If you will come with me, m'sieur, I think we are ready to complete the resurrection."

"Eh, yes, of course," Sadwin chattered.

He followed Lackey down a long, winding hall, and he could not for the life of him keep his eyes off Lackey's high heels which tapped so curiously on the wooden floor; the sound was reminiscent of something, and yet he could not exactly define it. Or perhaps it was that, at a time like this, when he was in the château, he did not wish to let his frightened mind go stumbling along such grim channels.

They were presently entering a room done entirely in a deep gray. In the center of it there was an operating table over which hung a maze of electrical appliances, none of which Sadwin could recognize as medical equipment he had ever before seen. One of Lackey's assistants, clad in black, stood at the table looking down.

Peter Craig lay on the table.

Mr. Sadwin moved timidly over and looked at Craig. He gasped. Although he had expected this, he could scarcely believe it—Craig was breathing. As the seconds ticked by, the breathing seemed to become more normal.

The tall black-clad assistant put something, which smelled like salts that revive you, under Craig's nose and waited.

Monsieur Roger Lackey stood back, one foot in front of the other. "The resurrection has been completed," he explained. "We are simply bringing him round. We usually add a little token to the chest of people we bring back to life; but I preferred to show you Craig alive and normal before attaching to him a remembrance from me."

Mr. Sadwin did not know he referred to a little glass coffin that, once broken, meant death; Sadwin only nodded. He was too overwhelmed with the miracle to consider any smaller items.

Peter Craig's eyes fluttered and opened. He looked around.

"Where am I?" It was a whisper.

"Sit up," Lackey ordered.

Craig tried, but could not.

The feat having been accomplished, the spell was broken; Mr. Sadwin's acute business cunning came rushing to the fore. "I have heard, Monsieur Lackey," he said, "of an artificial heart stimulant which will bring to life corpses only freshly dead. I have been told that experiments along this line have been successful in both Chicago and Berlin; and that in California a dog was once thus revived. But the life after that is on borrowed time. It is never lasting."

Roger Lackey's thin upper lip quivered angrily. "You are stating all this as a question?"

"Precisely."

"Ungrateful American dog," Lackey snapped. He stripped the shirt from Peter Craig. "Examine and see if you find any evidence that the heart has been tampered with or started beating again by any artificial machine. Such action depends upon injection. You would cer-

tainly see a clue of it. Look, please! Look carefully!"

Craig was propped up on his elbows now; he was blinking, as though he had difficulty in clearing his mind.

"You are right," Sadwin admitted. "I see no marks."

"Furthermore, you will continue to see Craig alive day after day; and if he remains in France as you intend doing, you will perhaps see him grow to a ripe old age."

"That's that's marvelous," Sadwin breathed.

"Indeed."

Craig's dry lips were moving: "I . I'm in the château?"

Roger Lackey nodded. "Come now, Mr. Sadwin. There is work my assistant must yet do; there is a necessary object to be attached to Mr. Craig's chest, I—"

A feminine voice from the door said: "Stand back and out of the way, Mr. Sadwin. I am going to see if Monsieur Lackey reacts to bullets."

They turned.

BRENDA MANNERS stood there, her hair still wet and bedraggled, the damp linen suit clinging tightly to her body. She held an automatic.

Sadwin gasped and stepped back, and there was no one between her and Lackey.

The assistant began to move toward her. She snapped: "Stand where you are." The man stopped in his tracks. Brenda gazed at Lackey, and her eyes were blazing.

"Has my sister been an interesting experiment, m'sieur? Has she been a good guinea pig? She is indeed very beautiful there in such a pretty coffin. I presume her presence has been a great joy to you."

"I found her drowned," Lackey said quickly. "I brought her back to life; but she was a case much harder than others, and she has been slow to rally. You are an ungrateful wench, Miss Manners, that you condemn me for saving the life of your sister."

"I suppose," Brenda snapped, "that when you came to the hotel room at the De Phane for me, that I, too, was drowning? My clothes might have been found on the beach. And after that it would be necessary that I compel myself to be twice as grateful to you."

The dull light fell jaggedly across Lackey's thin and sharp face. His voice was like the flow of deadly acid.

"Do you know to whom you speak?"

"To an ignorant Frenchman!"

"Has it never occurred to you that words tumble from your clumsy tongue without first going through the courtesy of being judged by your mind?"

"You resemble Satan. So have a hundred men I've known."

"I see."

"You may bluff the rest. But I'm not afraid of you!"

Monsieur Roger Lackey began to walk slowly toward her. The silence in the room was awful. Craig was rubbing a hand down over his face. Sadwin was staring; he was white and livid. Lackey moved in the direction of the girl.

Brenda bit her lip, then her finger jerked three times against the trigger of the gun.

The automatic roared; the bullets screamed from it. You saw the jarring impact against Lackey; you saw the fluttering of his clothing, and you smelled the burned garments. But he still moved forward. His high-cheekboned face was horrible now. All of the other lights in the room flickered out, and a blue illumination shone against Monsieur Lackey; his thin upper lip was twisted; his eyes gleamed, as though through the dim blue light. His high-heeled shoes kept moving forward.

Brenda screamed. She pumped the remaining three bullets at him.

He stopped, until the clatter of the gun had died down and the smoke had

cleared. Then he again moved toward her. Brenda screamed again. Roger Lackey reached out with long, slim fingers and grasped her by the shoulders. The gun dropped from her hand. She tried to shrink back. She kept screaming. His hands were cold. His face was only inches from her face—

XII.

PETER CRAIG stared at the struggling girl, and his mind seemed to clear for the first time. He raised himself on the table. The assistant came running toward him, and Craig kicked out; catching the man on the point of the jaw. Sadwin grasped at this, and turned and ran out through the hall, as fast as his fat legs would carry him.

Craig stood up on the table and leaped upon Roger Lackey's back. The man half caved under the impact of Craig's crashing body; he released his hold on Brenda. Lackey whirled, tried to shake off Craig. Craig got his arm under Lackey's throat and pressed on the Adam's apple.

Roger Lackey quickly and cleverly dropped backward and fell hard. The result was to crush Craig under him. He rolled, once left, once right; and then he pulled away; he was free. Lackey regained his feet and turned. His face was horrible, and the blue light was still on it.

Craig groped backward for footing. He stumbled against a light switch and turned the lights on full; his nimble fingers pressed another switch and the blue light went off. The assistant must have turned it on. Craig rushed for Lackey now; but Lackey caught Craig's arm, whirled him in a neat twist of jujitsu, swung the American over his shoulder, and sent him pounding to the floor.

Craig struggled to his feet. He seemed unsteady. Lackey rushed him; and Craig merely caught Lackey's hand, then fell—deliberately—flat on his back, and as he fell he planted his feet in Lackey's stomach. With his hand still holding Lackey's, he pulled the Frenchman forward; then his feet carried Lackey in rapid transit over Craig's entire supine body. It sent Lackey whirling several feet farther.

Craig was on his feet at once, but the assistant was rushing for him. Craig whirled to meet the attack, and he saw the glitter of a knife. He reached out, hit the man across the face with his fist; plunged desperately at the knife wrist.

But as he struggled, Roger Lackey moved in; he jerked back Craig's arm, bent it double in a hammer lock; he kicked Craig's legs behind the knees and bent them double. The assistant came on with the knife now, but Lackey angrily shoved him back.

"Get the glass coffin we were going to sew to his chest."

CRAIG struggled, but Lackey held him tightly. The assistant returned with the little glass coffin and a heavy glove. Lackey slipped on the glove; but as he did Craig butted his head into the assistant's stomach and sent him whirling backward. He crashed to the floor, holding the glittering little coffin upward, so that it wouldn't break.

Lackey wrenched Craig's arm. Sweating, straining, Craig turned on the Frenchman. He felt his arm crack as though it had broken, and then it was free. He rose, closing his fists and putting them together. He brought the combined force of his fists up under Lackey's jaw. But Lackey was not fazed; he was fazed no more than the bullets had fazed him, and his sleek face had a hideous grin on it. It occurred to Craig suddenly that this was sheer madman's futility. Lackey could not be bested. But there was nothing Craig could do but keep fighting, and this he did. He slashed his left around in a backstroke that would have torn any

other man's skin.

Lackey shook off the blow; and suddenly Craig saw that Lackey held the empty gun that Brenda had dropped. He batted it down across Craig's head; and as the American sagged and stumbled backward, Lackey rushed in, knocked him over. He stood up straight, and put his high-heeled boot over Craig's throat. He pressed down, so that Craig was gasping. He gasped for breath, and his hands fought to get the leg away. He kicked and squirmed, but it did no good. Lackey stood there with his foot planted on Craig's neck.

The assistant came forward clutching the little glass coffin between his fingers. He got down on his hands and knees, but he stayed carefully out of the range of Craig's flailing arms. Lackey dropped the heavy glove, and the assistant put it on. He put the glass coffin in the hand that wore the glove, then he sat crouched there, waiting to spring forward and fix the glass to Craig's bare and sweating chest.

Craig kept flailing out, but he saw the glittering little object, and the round, moon face of the man who held it in a gloved hand. He saw death as it waited there for its opportunity, and he was conscious of his breathing, and of the foot that was on his neck. To have died, and to have been buried, and now to die again, with no reprieve this time —cold, bleak death, and New York and life and sweetness and music gone from him. He squirmed, he tugged at the leg. But he was pinned down. There was no way for him to move. And the assistant crouched there, tense, leaning forward now, waiting, the gloved hand and its contents extended for the plunge—like the strike of a rattlesnake. Craig saw this, and he heard Roger Lackey.

"Well, go on! Hurry up. Kill him!"

These words flowed through Craig's ears, and his muscles stiffened; he waited there, for death; he waited and felt it coming, and he could concentrate on no other thing now. In all the world there was only himself and that gloved hand, and his eyes were watching it—

Then suddenly Brenda moved in from the doorway, recovered now; she stooped and picked up the knife Craig had wrenched from the assistant's hand. She hurried forward with it.

The assistant saw her, and he struck out with the gloved hand at Craig's chest.

But the assistant's diverted attention gave Craig the one instant of chance he needed. He grasped the wrist of that gloved hand, and stopped it; he swung the hand back in the direction of the assistant. The man was trying to move away from Brenda's flashing knife now; and as he made this quick and desperate move, his own gloved hand, held by Craig, loosed the bit of glass to crash to jagged splinters on the flooring. An instant later Craig slashed a knife-keen dagger of glass across the man's straining throat. He gurgled bubblingly, like the last water emptying from a great bottle, clawed at his ripped throat. In the next moment the man lay stretched out on the floor, jerking slightly.

Brenda turned toward Lackey, and he was forced to remove his foot from Craig's neck to lunge at her.

She met the attack; but Lackey grasped her wrist, pushed her arm back over her shoulder. Her fingers flew open. Lackey laughed, low; it was a chuckling, haunting laughter. He picked up Brenda and dropped her over his shoulder, and then he moved out of the room. His hand reached out and touched a button in the hall as he passed.

Peter Craig scrambled to his feet, but heavy oak doors were sliding closed. He raced to get through them, and the door closed in his face. He whirled about toward the other door. It banged shut. He turned toward a window. Automatically, it had become completely shuttered. Craig banged against the door. He was locked in the room.

He heard Brenda screaming.

"Back—keep backing," Craig snapped. "A drop of this and you're through—"

XIII.

MR. WINTHROP SADWIN'S heart felt like coronary thrombosis.

He ran down the hall to the door, and he clutched at the knob to get it open. It was a heavy, thick door, and the knob would not turn. He pulled at it, he jerked it, he banged it; but it would not give. He stopped, and puffed, and he put his hand to his heart and counted the times it skipped. Sweat poured down his fat cheeks. After all, sixty-one was old age, and one did not expect to have to be subjected to such excitement. He stood there, puffing, but as he gradually got his breath he didn't think his age old; he returned somewhat to normal. He looked around for another means of escape. He was well convinced that this was the house of the Devil, and he was going to get the "hell" out. He did not know how he had ever imagined he and Faust had anything in common. This was a modern world, and literary classics belonged on shelves, not in the secret hearts of retired businessmen.

He heard the sound of fighting down the hall, and he was extremely glad that it was removed from him. It was not that he was a coward, but it was asinine to butt into things that you didn't understand, just to be a Samaritan of some kind, and probably a dead one. If he ever got out on the street again he would rush to his hotel and he would leave Deauville—the family with him—intact. Jack with his rattling tennis rackets, and Lillian with her flock of shallow-faced nobility, and his prim and gray-haired wife who would keep asking: "What is the hurry, Winth? What is the hurry?"

He tried the door again, and he did not himself realize the excitement that pulsed through him; he thought of the damnedest things while he pulled at the door, such as the reason why his wife called him "Winth." He had never learned how this started, nor could he remember how many years ago she had addressed him with the startling abbreviated concoction. Among other things he also remembered the softness of the wicker chair which stood even at this very instant on the lanai of his suite, in view of the ocean, where he might rest, and sip at brandy or champagne, and feel a contentment with himself and the world. He did not know what he was doing here. He could not understand it at all.

Some sort of consciousness finally penetrated to his brain that it was futile to try the door any longer, and he ran into another room. He smashed his foot through a window, only to find it tightly guarded with iron bars. He ran from window to window, as fast as his fleshy legs would carry him, and he found that the situation of bars was not a singular one. This was not a house; it was a trap. Or perhaps it was hell itself. He must consider that when he had time. Perhaps he had died and gone to hell, and here he was.

At least, this was the thought which sprang into his mind while he was in flight, looking for an escape. He did not particularly know where he was running; and presently he stopped. He panted breathlessly and looked around him.

He was in a room done entirely in black, and in it there was a glass coffin. In spite of himself, Mr. Sadwin's fear momentarily melted and gave way to curiosity. He stared at the coffin, and he saw the nude and lovely body of the golden-haired girl. A moment ago he had heard another girl say something about her sister, and now he knew.

HE MOVED toward the coffin, but as he did, the girl within stirred feebly, and a moan broke from her lips; it shivered out through the room. Mr. Sadwin stood very still, and his heart somersaulted into quivering thrombosis.

He gaped at the girl, trying to remember Dante—the immortal passages, the winding path strewn with the upright figures of beautiful nude women.

But realization of his own predicament trickled back through him with amazing rapidity, and the curiosity turned and ran in a different direction. He turned and looked around for a door different from the one through which he had just come.

He saw the door and went toward it, but just as he reached the hall, the tall, black-caped figure whom six bullets had failed to kill came sweeping toward him, carrying on his shoulders the screaming dark-haired girl.

Mr. Sadwin shrank back and became a nonentity. Monsieur Roger Lackey brushed past him in a terrible rush, and kept on going. He disappeared down the corridor. In the opposite direction someone was batering at a door.

Mr. Sadwin had not time to consider this entirely foreign sound, for it in no way fitted in with his own plans to get to freedom. He sneaked into the hall and went in the direction Lackey had gone. But he turned sharply to the right. He walked through an antechamber, and then he was in a large room, through which he could feel a whiff of breeze. He heard the sea crashing on the sea wall. But the room itself was plunged in darkness.

Gratefully, Mr. Sadwin moved through the room toward the French doors. He was not very much of a swimmer, but any chance that he might take would be like falling out of bed compared to the fright he would have to endure if he remained any longer in this house.

He smelled the ocean air, and he almost imagined himself outside, free again, ready to go back to his hotel and dramatically announce that they were leaving for Paris by the first train. In his family Mr. Sadwin was quite a fellow; but here in this château he felt the inferiority of a small boy in a dank and fetid tomb.

He hurried, because he could not get out quickly enough.

But his foot jarred into something human. He fell flat on his face.

For a moment Sadwin lay there on the floor too frightened to move. He felt the person into whom he had jarred moving feebly. Sadwin crawled away. He heard the man on the floor grunting; and then the movement which was as though he was sitting up.

Panic beat like a toy drum in Mr. Sadwin's unsteady heart. He kept crawling toward the windows, but he was breathing so hard that he did not make very good time. Nothing remained in him now except the desire to smash through those windows and to get into the water.

The moon shone dimly through the glass and it extended deeply into the room, so that he suddenly saw the slim form of the man etched against the blackness. The man was standing.

Mr. Winth Sadwin continued to crawl toward the French doors, and he was nearly there now. Just a few more feet and he would make it. He had never in his life prayed harder for success than he did now.

The man, whose figure was clear in the moonlight, had heard Mr. Sadwin and was coming toward him.

In desperation Sadwin rose and threw himself against one of the glass doors. The glass broke; he went hurtling out onto the tiled porch. But he had come through with such force that he landed on his side. He got up now, shakily, and went for the water.

But a cold hand grasped him by the collar and yanked him back.

XIV.

BRENDA'S screams subsided.

It was no use to scream, and the breath had gone out of her. All of the

cool faith she had exercised in believing that Monsieur Lackey must be as mortal as any man was gone, and she did not know what to expect. She had come in desperation to help. Surely, she had successfully done everything she had set out to do—she had gotten into the château; she had shot the one man who owned it. What else remained for a human being? What other thing could have possibly been done? It took away the pit of your stomach to realize that you were battling something which ordinary fight could not kill or stop; and you didn't know what to do, except to submit dully, and hope that death would not be long in arriving. When hope was gone there was little else. Her screams were futile. They would attract no one.

She lay there limply on Roger Lackey's shoulders as he climbed flight after flight of stairs, and she could only wonder when the end would be. Lackey was breathing heavily and yet he did not seem exhausted.

At last he reached what seemed to be the attic, though it could have been only the third floor. He turned and went into a room. It was tiled in white, and there were small tables lying against the wall with strange objects on them which Brenda could not at once make out.

Lackey set her down, and when she saw what it was on the tables, another scream burst from her throat and there was nothing in the world she could do to stop it. She screamed again until she thought the tissues in her lungs were torn—and she could not help herself.

On one of the tables lay a corpse without a head; and on a second one, just an arm; the end of it dry and sticky with hard blood; on the third there was a man's head, the eyes open and staring, as though those eyes stared directly at Brenda. On a fourth little table there was a torso the skin from which had been opened so that the entrails were nauseatingly visible.

The last scream broke in a whisper from Brenda's lips, and Monsieur Lackey pushed her up against the wall. She heard something clank, and saw that it was a chain. But she was looking up at him now, and the odor of the dead in the room lived in her nostrils. She looked up at Roger Lackey's carved and glistening face, and she saw now that it was not a lighting effect which had traced the blue shadows about his countenance; but that the shading, like an atmosphere of complete and terrible evil, was everywhere about him in a transparent mist. It may have been something which betrayed him as beyond the realm of man—this blue mist. It may have been a substance which came only in moments when he was highly excited. She did not attempt to question her sore and frightened mind further.

Lackey's hard eyes were bright, and his thin lips were drawn back.

"So you would banish Satan from the face of this earth merely by the use of a gun!"

She only stared.

"You are as incredible a fool as the others of your race. Stay here, since you sought entrance so vigorously; I may have a place for you."

He turned, and was gone.

XV.

IT WAS quite apparent to Peter Craig that he could not escape the room, and it occurred to him hat it would be foolish to waste further energy in trying. He might need that energy later; at least, there was in him the hope that he would. He had gone through the business of dying to get here, and he prayed that it was for a good reason.

He found his clothing and put it on. The clothing was that which had been laid out for his eternal sleep, and the cloth felt damp and heavy, as though it had seeped in the moisture of the earth

that had fallen upon his wooden casket.

He sat back on a table, and it was difficult for thoughts to pursue regular channels through his mind. He was not sure of anything that he thought. He knew only utter confusion. No man, in his senses, believed in the supernatural, he told himself; and yet, could it have been that once upon the earth whole races of people believed in and prayed to forces which in essence were the same that the figure of Monsieur Roger Lackey so expertly suggested? Could that worship have gone on, if there was no proof to back it up, if there was not some small shred of truth in it? Man had never been a complete fool, and there were those who said ancient wisdom exceeded the modern. Could the thing which brought a damning question to Craig's mind be possible? He tried to shake it off, but the very aura that was evil seemed to be around him, pressing against him, like the air of some other planet, which, though it is air, is heavy in pounds. Was it possible that the very transition of thought through space, thought and thought-action, could bring about the disagreeable and morbid heaviness which hung so like flakes of lead in the atmosphere?

Peter Craig had been through all of the terror man can know in a lifetime of danger. He had known the ultimate which is death, and he had been through it; and now he lived with a burning lust for life, and yet there was in his heart a horror more stagnant and foreboding than death. It was like a screaming meteor which dragged him downward through a universal cesspool, polluting his very soul. He was like a thin, burned cinder of paper trembling in a cold wind.

He suddenly sat up straight. The doors that had closed with such a bang, sealing the room, opened now.

Monsieur Roger Lackey stood in the doorway, tall and gaunt; and though he smoked no cigarette, there seemed to be a wisp of blue drifting up past his eyes. In his hand he gripped a gun, and on the diabolic countenance there was a humorless smile. He stepped into the room. His eyes traveled to the corpse of his assistant. Splinters of glass still glistened on the torn face of the dead man.

"SO YOU disbelieve my power, Craig?" he asked. "You died, and I brought you to life; but you doubt my ability still. You think it some trick. Twilight sleep, they call it in America; simply a drug the lasting power of which is five hours—" He strode into the room, holding the gun still. "And the glass coffin," he continued. He looked up. "Do you know what that is, my futile fool? Poison? A drug embedded in the glass? Some insidious chemical which kills when once gotten in the blood stream?"

"One of those three," Craig said stiffly.

"Ah, I see; cling to fact and the life around you. Men are such fools! Such confounded idiots! You cannot even believe that which is in front of your eyes! I damn you for your blunt and inexcusable stupidity!"

"Thank you," Craig said.

"Don't talk to me," Lackey roared. "Your puppet's mouth spews up a gibbering of words both childish and unintelligible. Your Philistine mind is incapable of beyond-the-surface comprehension. Cling to an earthly reality loaned to you for but a seventy-year period. That to you is the endless universe; as small and as perishable as a cardboard box. A meaningless confusion of days and nights. A frantic struggle of beating hands against an inexorable wall which cannot but some day engulf them!"

Craig's face blanched; magician's tricks, odd effects, a resemblance to Satan—none of these could he accept as fact, because the eye was too

often deceived, and humans are taught from birth to penetrate the venality of those who would fool them. But these words, tumbling about him in a vomit of eloquent rage, no man endowed with feet which are clay could speak them. No mortal could make these words ring with such complete and intolerant passion.

"The glass coffins then—what are they?"

"Symbols given my curse; a spell that is deathly. But that which is given can be taken back. Do you think that I would be forced to resort to poisons? To the crude mixtures of a floundering mankind? The headaches you received before you died, the fever and the pain that preceded death, they followed in the wake after my spell when I deemed it best that your too-wordy mouth should be closed once and for all. I returned you to life for Mr. Sadwin—but I shall eventually return you to death for myself. Death, however, is too simple. There are things I wish you to see tonight. Things I wish you to know and experience in your screaming and squirming soul before you return to your grave—"

Craig nodded affably. "Your theatricals are excellent, m'sieur. But do you feel it in keeping that Satan should use electrically controlled door locks? Would not some lesser demons be more suitable to your pretended status?"

Monsieur Lackey looked at him levelly for a moment, then a tight, hard smile twisted his lips. "For one so lately dead, you have small faith in my honesty."

Craig laughed softly. "The honesty of Satan, Prince of Liars? Or the honesty of Monsieur Lackey, fraud extraordinary? One who, perhaps, by such magic as is covered by prestidigitation, slips a coma-producing drug into food or drink, and injects an offsetting drug into corpses? A clever trick indeed. Mr. Sadwin was impressed enough, perhaps, to agree to pay for the protection of your racket—one the beauty of which is that only the dead are sure it is a racket?"

MONSIEUR LACKEY'S twisted smile widened. "A certain ancient enemy of mine remarked on the slight faith of men. But perhaps I can convince even you." His tall, slender figure left the doorway, walked over to the slumped, twisted figure of the fallen assistant. His lean fingers displayed an unsuspected power as they wove in the bushy hair of the corpse and held it upright, legs dangling loosely, dark, half-clotted blood welling afresh from the gaping throat. He then placed the corpse on a table.

His other hand passed over the throat, the loose sleeve hiding the man's neck for a moment. "Alix, my friend, you are incredibly stupid, stupid beyond even the normal of you mortals. Do you never learn? For the third time you blunder into death."

The eyes of the assistant fluttered and opened. He looked up into the satanic face. Words babbled from the mouth.

"I am sorry I permitted such a thing to happen to me. I am sorry I permitted the man to—"

"That is the second time. The first was Bud Worth."

"Get up; I will need you, weakling though you are."

The assistant got quickly from the table.

Craig fell back into a chair; his face was running with sweat; he ran his hand down over his eyes; then he looked at his hands. They shook as though with rapid palsy. He folded the hands in his lap. There lingered in his mind for a moment that which was incredulity, and for this fraction of a second it was as though an old woman rocked back and forth in the gray of his brain cells—an old woman, her face distorted, and her laughter ringing out. The old woman was insanity. Her laughter grew louder. Then Craig dispelled her from his mind,

and he had to believe what he had seen Futile though it may be, he had to cope with the man who was the Devil, in any way that he could. This much he knew: you could not kill Satan, but in a fight you could down him. Perhaps you could tear at the body in which he had projected himself. Craig's sensibilities did not tell him anything beyond this point.

Lackey stared at Craig, and then he roared with laughter. "Have I proven anything to you, my shaking and terror-filled shell of emptiness? Do the eyes in the sockets of your skull still function quite so well as they did a moment ago?"

"I see," Craig whispered hoarsely.

"Then?"

Craig's tired face came up. "Shall I continue to address you as Monsieur Lackey. Or would you prefer a more correct title: Mephistopheles, for instance? Satan is so overused."

"You still gibe sarcastically, in an ill attempt at humor. That is so utterly American. You try, in your vain way, to laugh at that which is before you. And yet, I find pleasure in the fact that your dim mind has accepted me as my true self."

"I still don't know what to call you."

"NAMES! Do names matter? It is the spirit which lives. Since the days of Black Mass and Diabolism humans have called me a variety of things—his Satanic majesty, the Prince of Devils." He sucked breath into the rotting lungs of Lackey's body. "In 'King Lear,' Shakespeare made kindly reference to me. He wrote: 'The Prince of Darkness is a gentleman—' and I have been called the Tempter, the Evil One, the Foul Fiend, the Devil Incarnate, the Father of Lies, the Author of Evil—" He moved toward Peter Craig. "And I exalt in all of that bad eminence. It does justice to the fact that a universe, even like man, must have both good and evil; separate beings. Complete good; and complete evil. It is a common and stale saying that I must have my due. But as for name, I rejoice so in my return to earth in human form, I invent a new one, and dedicate its first use to you. You may henceforth call me 'Brenda'—'Brenda Manners'!"

Craig started forward with a jolt. He leaped from the chair. Roger Lackey shoved him back.

"Now you know what awaits you tonight? It is a human fallacy to believe that I must appear as the prints of artists have pictured me. Do you see a tail, or horns? Do you see any of those things beyond common resemblance? No! I can take the form of a woman quite as well. A clever author, Owen Meredith, once even anticipated I would do this, and he wrote: 'The Devil, my friends, is a woman just now.' So be it, then!"

"You . you can't do that!"

"For your interest, yes." Monsieur Lackey bowed slightly, sardonically. "You might consider my little problem. I waited some four hundred years since certain of my enemies burned me out of my vessels here, and am now returned by the slightest chance. It was the new belief only in what one can see and feel that held me bound. And because this Monsieur Lackey found he resembled the traditional picture of myself, and was one of the hardest of your hard materialists, I am here. Only such a stupid one would have delved quite so deeply into the books of the past, tried quite so faithfully to prove them silly."

Monsieur Lackey smiled. "His proof —failed." The smile became tinged, suddenly, with acid. "So did his heart. I became incarnate—in a dead body. I've held this rotting corpse together since then, but tonight, Mr. Craig, I believe I will transfer it to a more usable body."

"If you can," snapped Craig, "why haven't you?"

Monsieur Lackey shrugged. "I have

Continued on page 141

THE MISSING OCEAN

By H. W. GUERNSEY

THE MISSING OCEAN

—and the Captain loved the sea, and the ship, where he was master of his own little world—

By H. W. Guernsey

SINCE that day when he was fifteen years old—a husky kid with broad shoulders and an insane determination to sail all of the seas, to box the compass, to get to know so much about navigation, by easy stages, as would relieve him of the obligation to take his hat off to any man—Captain Amandus Rudolf had not spent as long as two weeks at a stretch on dry land. In port he kept to his yessel mostly Nowhere was there a black, brown, red, yellow, white, or pink girl waiting for him. The sex was not essential to steering a straight course. Captain Rudolf liked his water deep, and the dirtier the weather the better.

It was three days now in the lodgings on Bethune Street in Manhattan, and it would be five days more before the *James A. Waltham* sailed—some governmental curiosity about her cargo. More than that, his cabin still stank from the spray used to kill the big tiger roaches which had eaten his fingernails down to the quick one night. So he thought he would take a stroll down Bethune to West and take a look at the Hudson, which he once thought was a big river. The *James A.'s* mate was to meet him in a joint in one hour, and probably he would have breakfast with the slob. There were some things to talk over.

The morning was bright and serene. For a moment Rudolf stood at the top of the steps with his legs wide apart, his old hat jammed on his head as though in a high wind, his horny thumbs hooked under his suspenders. He turned an ugly look toward Greenwich on the left, then scowled west. He started down the steps.

As yet there was no sunlight in the street. Two kids were trying to open up a hydrant at the corner. Three pedestrians were in sight, and a couple of trucks—then a resplendent sedan rolled by. At first Rudolf thought it was a reflection from a polished windshield. At any rate it was light.

It was as quick as a wink of sunlight on water, seen blindingly, and then gone forever. It had the electrical hue of violet, and was an instantaneous flicker that serpentined down from the sky. Captain Rudolf ducked involuntarily, and fell.

It was as though the earth had been snatched from under his feet. He clapped his hand on his head to save his hat, as the feeling grew on him that he was rocketing in a descent of howling velocity. At the same time he felt suspended, as though the law of gravity had ceased operating, like the time in Liverpool when he had gotten himself nauseatingly swilled-drunk; or, the seeming interruption in gravitational pull might have been the deception of the wind tornadoing out of the cosmic abyss and tearing at him, knocking another law out of kilter—the rate of acceleration of his particular falling body.

His feet hit bottom gently, but he went to all fours on general principles until he

could reconnoiter. Brushing his knees off automatically as he rose, he looked back at the steps to see what he had slipped on. There weren't any steps. Aghast, he took a hurried look at the street. He was in a spacious vaulted corridor, or arcade, which was paved, walled, and domed with bricks giving off a luminous glow like daylight. Since the reverberations of this light were so complex, a man didn't cast a shadow. More than that, the silly-looking citizens inhabiting the place each had his nimbus shining like a visible aura. Amandus stuck his arms akimbo and growled: "Now, what the hell?"

AT A RESPECTFUL distance of ten or twelve feet a ring of citizens formed and inspected him with solemn intentness, from his big bulldog shoes on up through his baggy pants, his shirt, candy-stripe suspenders, flowered neck-tie, to the limp, leathery felt hat on his head.

Amandus took a few steps, knotting his powerful fists and using marked elbow action. The ring of rubbernecks stayed intact, moving with him. Amandus stopped, skinned his hat off and mopped his forehead. A man in the imprisoning ring ejaculated: "My word, they've done it!"

All around Amandus sounded a rush of spontaneous laughter, because every man in sight was as bald as a frog, whereas Amandus boasted a head of thick reddish-brown hair. Besides, he only shaved his upper lip—and it only to keep soup and the reek of rum out of it—so his long equine countenance was framed in a spade of coppery beard.

There were only two types of garment in the crowd—one for the women and one for the men—as though they all belonged to a cult. The hair of the females was an identical medium blond, just as all the bald skulls looked as though they had been cast from the same mold.

The girls wore shorts and a snug, sleeveless tunic belted at the waist. Their legs were bare, and the shoes on their feet differed from those of the men only in size. In form they were all nymphean, superlatively curvate in the modeling of their breasts, hips, and straight long legs. Amandus reflected that the orbs of the *James A.'s* mate, Mr. Kendall, would have bugged out of his head.

The men wore shorts of the same lusterless material, a shade grayer and not draped, and wore their tunics inside their pants instead of outside. Legs bare again. If you didn't count the baldness, they were all of princely stature. It was as though ugliness, skinniness, disease, obesity or any departure from standard measurement—the fixed average—was against the law.

"Well, what the hell are you laughing at?" roared Amandus. With the way time was passing he would have to proceed directly to the joint on West for the confabulation with Mr. Kendall.

"What do you expect?" a bald young man inquired pleasantly. "After all, your appearance is ridiculous."

"It is, is it?" snarled Amandus. "What do you think you look like to me, with your damned-fool clothes, your bald knobs and all of you alike as sardines? Who are you, anyhow?"

All around the circle the men and women eyed each other with wonderment. A young man cut a radius to Captain Rudolf, sat on his heels and asked: "Do you mind?"

He scrutinized the blobs of shoes, which Amandus had shined by hand, with smiling offensiveness. But he neglected to ask Amandus' permission to tweak the trousers leg and raise it in order to inspect the woolen socks purchased in London. It was too much. Aggravated, Amandus made a paddle out of his right hand and cut at the air

with it. There was a *whop* of iron-hard calluses meeting the side of a head with bullet speed; the young man rose a few inches, changed direction and assumed a horizontal position in which he slid on the glassy pavement all the way into the crowd.

"ANYONE else?" Amandus inquired briskly, and the circle expanded somewhat. There was a commotion to his right. A gap formed in the circumference, and through the passageway hiked two men in military step with each other. They were distinguished from the other men by the broad leather belts they wore around their waists. They hiked up to Amandus, and when they observed his bunchy fists they drew an article from their belts in unison. The instruments resembled satin-finished steel cigars, fitted the hand snugly, and were aimed at Amandus. He asked: "What do *you* want?" His voice was inflected downward by belligerence.

"Where is your license?" he was asked.

Amandus decided that he had tarried too long and that he had business elsewhere. Time to get under way and out of the building, if he had to knock these slobs down one by one. He had heard the click of the instrument held by one of the men—they were policemen—but didn't connect the sound with the fact that his feet were stuck to the floor; he looked down at them to see what was the matter, and found that he couldn't look down. His heart was beating like big gulps in this throat, but he was petrified. He couldn't move.

With one of the streamlined cops holding the innocent handle of metal, the other advanced smartly and searched Amandus from stem to stern. Under all eyes it was very embarrassing, and he strained to his utmost. The cop scanned the sheaf of papers in his breast pocket, spent an infuriatingly long time examining the collection of coins, keys, heavy gold watch—the odds and ends Amandus carried.

"Come along quietly," he was ordered.

Whatever nightmare force held him was released suddenly, and he almost fell down. The two policemen grabbed an arm apiece. They were strong boys, single-minded. They warned him that they would use the ray on him again if he didn't behave, and Amandus' shoulders jerked with humiliation as they escorted him to an elevator.

"That was very convincing," said a man in the crowd they had left.

"Oh, I don't know," a girl replied. "He was an ugly brute, that's the only thing. I suppose there were such specimens, but I don't believe they wore clothes like that all the time."

On the way up in the elevator Amandus asked his captors: "What's the idea of this? Where are we going?"

"To police headquarters. Where do you suppose?"

"Am I under arrest? What for?"

"You can't go around like that. You know the law."

"I must be going nuts. Listen, boys, I'm captain of the *James A. Waltham*, and I've got to get aboard my ship."

"Just keep your shirt on," he was advised courteously.

"What part of town have I got to? I never saw this place before."

"That isn't surprising. This is the main tower."

Amandus looked at his watch and said anxiously: "Look, boys, I haven't done anything, and it's getting later and later."

"Everything will be taken care of, old man."

Amandus cursed under his breath and waited for developments with grim impatience. It was uncommonly warm. He decided that he had gone momentarily nuts with the heat and wandered into a private building where his mere presence was a violation of law recog-

nized by the city police, unless, in fact, a practical joke was being played on him. If it was a joke it was a serious matter to him, and he would start some fireworks before he left.

IT WAS his feeling that the car's speed of ascent was luxuriously slow, since the motion was smooth and the car was completely inclosed; but when it stopped, he had the vertiginous feeling of having had his weight abruptly reduced to two ounces.

The arrest was no joke, and he was in the hands of the law. His captors escorted him to an office and left him with an elderly man whose eyes were the brightest and most dangerous that Amandus had ever seen. In spite of his effeminate, brief costume there was no doubt that this was a person of authority. Amandus' belongings were distributed on a desk and subjected to the most detailed scrutiny by the chief, John Cutten.

"Where did you acquire those articles?" Cutten asked. "These coins in particular."

"Why, they're mine. I got the money in change last night at Joe's Bar down on—"

"Oh, no, you didn't. Tell the truth, now. Either you're a collector or you stole them from the Metropolitan."

"Neither!" Amandus exploded angrily. "I never stole a cent in my life!"

"Then where did you acquire a handful of valuable coins, every specimen of which is three thousand years old?"

"Three th— You're crazy!"

"Perhaps one of us is," Cutten rejoined significantly. "What is your story about these old manuscripts?"

"Them's nothing but my private papers. Nothing but letters and stuff."

"All of them dated between 1931"—that was a promissory note from a man he had been chasing around the seven seas for as many years—"and 1939." Cutten opened a letter with the reverent fingers of an Egyptologist unrolling a papyrus inscribed with the complete works of Sappho. "1939, and this is 4939; exactly three thousand years."

"This is what?"

"4939," Cutten answered absently, reading the captain's letter.

Amandus stared, so thunderstruck that he wasn't worried about the letter being read. The letter contained full instructions for assembling a cargo of guns, ammuition, airplane and light tank parts, and other war materials for Loyalist Spain. He hiked around Cutten's desk to the window, and looked out, aghast.

He was, at least, a mile in the air, in a room in the column of an unimaginable tower. In lower levels the giant skyscraper eased away in flowing terraces. In the distance gleamed other towers in the morning sunlight. Amandus screwed his head around to look up fearfully, leaning out, and the mighty shaft of the tower continued right on up into the blue. There was no sign of the Hudson or East rivers. No doubt they flowed somewhere beneath the sprawl of masonry down there. There was no indication that the Bay existed any more. In the most distant east were mysterious, half-seen pencilings of metal against the haze.

Cutten's hands pulled him back into the room.

"What is you address, Mr. Rudolf?"

"I've been staying at a place on Bethune Street, but my address is the *James A. Waltham.*"

Cutten's remarkable bright eyes got a little narrow. "There is no such place as Bethune Street. What do you mean by this other name?"

"My ship." Amandus' alarm was slowly developing into the beginnings of horror.

"Your ship?" Cutten prompted.

"Sure. The *James A.* You know what a ship is. A vessel. It has en-

gines in it that burn coal or oil, and screws that push it through the water. It's the way you cross oceans."

"Yes, indeed. The way you cross oceans." Cutten touched a button on his desk, and in came a pair of men wearing the broad leather belts. The chief said merely: "Dr. Davency."

DAZED, Amandus was escorted to another elevator, and they went higher up in the tower. Their destination was a suite of offices filled with laboratory equipment, masses of glass and metal apparatus. Shelves filled with labeled bottles went up to the ceiling all around. The two cops delivered Aamndus to Dr. Davency and departed.

Davency wore spectacles whose lenses were a half inch thick, giving him the goggling, inhuman expression of something fished out of the deep. He asked Amandus a few preliminary questions, which Amandus answered automatically in a low voice, then indicated a chair. Amandus sat down. Davency pushed up a mass of apparatus mounted on wheels and adjusted a shell of metal, the business-end of a jointed metal arm, until it was touching his hair without making contact with his skull. A switch clicked, and a thin whine filled the air, a penetrating needle-slim whine that became hypnotic as the seconds passed. Something touched the base of his skull and traveled up and over to his forehead—latitudinally the same. Unerring metal fingers that measured him. Click of another switch. The air was warm, but Amandus had the feeling that his brain was turning to ice.

Davency dabbed at Amandus' forehead with a wet swab. In his other hand he held a four-inch darning needle, from whose head a cable ran to the humming machinery. He centered the point against Amandus' forehead, aimed, then slowly drove the bodkin into his skull up to the butt. Amandus didn't realize what he was doing because there was no pain; he raised his fingers to feel, and after that he was afraid to move.

"Hm-m-m," Davency grunted, commenting on a discovery. He went to an instrument set on his desk, pressed a button and reported: "There's nothing wrong with this man, Cutten."

Just as clear in the room was Cutten's answering: "How about his hair, Davency? And his costume? And the specimens of his pockets? The old coins and manuscripts? Where did he get them?"

"Inexplicable," said Davency. "The only worry I have is whether this man's brain is normal, and it is, except for the time quotient. It's the same phenomenon we observed in the others, and they were readjusted easily enough. Do you want me to go ahead, or shall I send him back to you?"

"Go ahead. But this is the seventeenth time one of these birds has turned up. What's the secret?"

"You've got me. We're working on it."

Davency came back, pulled the bodkin out of Amandus' head. He asked: "Where did you tell Cutten you were staying?"

"On Bethune Street," Amandus answered, feeling the hole in his forehead. It was no larger than a pore now, already.

"Don't worry about that," Davency recommended. "It will close up completely. Come along."

They passed through several rooms where men were working too intently to notice them, into a library where there were only maps—in books on the shelves, done in brilliant coloring and detail on the walls, large ones backed with cloth and hanging from racks.

"Bethune Street, Manhattan, the nineteen hundreds," Davency told the librarian. While the young fellow was searching among the racks, Davency asked Amandus detailed questions about

the exact spot where he had found himself a mile or so below. So many feet from the elevator to Cutten's office, so many feet out from the wall of the corridor, approximately the distance below the uptown turn in the corridor.

They looked at the map of ancient Manhattan, and the librarian retired.

"Taking into account the drift in latitude and longitude," Davency reflected aloud, "you turned up in the spot which corresponds approximately to the address you gave. It is quite, quite baffling. With seventeen such occurrences known, there must be some force at work indeed."

Amandus was staring at the map covering the whole wall to his left, and asked: "What's that?"

"The map of New York," Davency responded, "of course." He went on talking to himself, and the librarian glanced up with a smile now and then. The doctor mentioned stray "fissures in time," which might catapult a man, when he walked into one as had Amandus, for varying distances into the future or the past. There was the queer, slow, soft, drifting lightning bolt through which Amandus had passed on his way down the steps from the door of his rooming house on Bethune Street. In the police records were dozens and dozen of cases of disappearances, of people who never were seen again. In the newspaper files these disappearances were vastly multiplied in a world-wide survey. More to the point, there were documented cases of appearances which could not be explained by the most ingenious scientific tools. A man steps up to a mailbox on the corner to drop a letter into the slot; the letter flutters to the sidewalk, and with suddenness too brief to be registered by any instrument—least of all the human eye—the man isn't there any more. Gone—completely, irrevocably. And all through recorded time people like Captain Rudolf turned up, phenomenal, since long before the phenomenon of Christ. The unknown force which whisked individuals out of their own times into distant ones, at random, was not a thing that could be harnessed like electricity and directed and controlled through wires. Devancy thought it had a connection with telepathy. One fact was certain, inescapable in the law of averages. Disappearing meant never showing up again. Conversely, appearing was settled; there wasn't a chance in billions, in a legion of lifetimes, of a man like Rudolf ever returning. He could never go back.

DAVENCY turned him over to a couple of assistants, and the assistants made him strip. They ordered his garments sent to the museum, and after a compulsory shower he dressed in the regulation soft shorts and jerkin. He had hairy legs, and a tuft of hair peeked out from the opening of the shirt near his throat. It was just as silly as wearing a bathing suit.

They escorted him into a three-room apartment near the top of the tower, allowing him to keep his watch. The watch had been made in France and it was a good one, varying only a couple of seconds a year at the most; it had been his grandfather's, then his father's. He had taken it apart and put it together again several times on the high seas, and it was still good for years.

He looked out into the corridor, and the men waiting for the elevator motioned him to get back inside. He closed the door and went all through the apartment systematically. There were many conveniences, several whose purpose he couldn't imagine at all. He was living in a tower of Babel, and he looked out the window at the immeasurable reaches of it stretching away.

It was inconceivable. He was remembering the map of Manhattan he had looked at in the library, and the other mural maps. There was the one of the

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ocean. The Atlantic Ocean wasn't there any more; it was nothing but a twisting lake running from Greenland down to the Antarctic. What was more, all of the geography of both poles was drawn in, green with vegetation, crawling with rivers and dotted with cities of strange names. The climatic cycle had swung around and this was the Golden Age again. There wasn't any winter, any more than there was before Ragnarok, before the Edens and the Isles of the Blessed of legend were destroyed. That was why it was so warm in New York, and around the world for that matter.

What was worse, there weren't any ships. No liners. The oceans were all crossed with bridges from shore to shore, and otherwise radiating like the spokes of a wheel from a cluster of new islands in mid-Atlantic where Atlantis was supposed to have been. There was a new continent in the Pacific south of the Equator.

All the water was bridged. There were no ships any more, no boats but the small ones used along the shores for amusement—for fishing and the like. All cargoes went by truck and train over the bridges.

There weren't any ships. This was the year 4939, and there wasn't any need for the kind of ship which Rudolf understood. He kept staring until the sound of the door opening behind him made him turn.

A handsome girl entered the apartment, closed the door and looked at him, waiting. She took a step forward, looked puzzled and backed up to the door again.

"What do you want?" Amandus growled.

"Dr. Davency sent me," she explained in a soft voice.

"Get out," Amandus ordered.

The girl put her hand on the knob and turned, then faced him again. Her eyes dropped to the floor. She said: "Please don't send me away, Mr. Rudolf . Captain Rudolf, I mean. If I'm not satisfactory, I'll be disciplined."

Amandus turned scarlet. He thought of the seaman whom he had had to hang in irons on the last voyage, wondering what she meant by "disciplined," and by "satisfactory." He grumbled: "All right. Sit down there in that chair and don't bother me." He turned to the window and looked out again. He knew she was staring at his back, and after a few minutes she began to sing a song seductively, a persuasive little song that was compelling in its melody alone.

"4939," Amandus muttered, trying to shut the song out of his ears. "I'll be damned."

Long Island wasn't an island any more; it was grafted onto the continent by the upward shouldering of earth. And the continental shelf and beyond were now coastline. There were cities and rich farm land. Between New York and the greater city of eastern New York at the new mouth of the Hudson, several hundred miles away, twisted the greatest of all river beds, the Grand Canyon of the Hudson.

AMANDUS turned around suddenly and asked the girl: "Is this 4939?"

"Yes, captain," she whispered.

"There ain't no ships any more?"

"Only by air—the planes, and the rockets."

"What happened to the Atlantic Ocean? It ain't there any more. It's gone."

"You don't have to yell at me," she said. "The Atlantic has been that way for the last thousand years or more. In a few thousand years from now—I don't know how many; you'll have to ask Dr. Davency—the continents will sink and be the way they were. We'll never see it."

"Hm-m-m-m," said Captain Rudolf. "There ain't any ships?"

"There aren't any ships. The oceans are bridged."

"You mean there ain't any oceans," Amandus said morosely. He gave a sour look out the window. "I've got to find out about my ship, the *James A. Waltham.* Where is it? Eh? Who do I ask about it?"

She said, hesitantly: "You . . . you might call the Bureau of Public Record. I'll call them for you." She rose from the chair with practiced grace and pressed a button on an instrument near the door, on the wall. She said: "Yes, the newspaper records of 1939. Yes, that's right."

"It might take a little while," answered someone from somewhere in the great labyrinth below.

"I'll wait," said the girl. Lovely as she was, she smiled at Amandus as though he were the most-sought-after creature on earth. He looked out the window, trying to see the ocean. He took hold of his left shoulder with his right hand, and tweaked the cluster of hairs there.

From the instrument on the wall came the masculine voice, saying: "All right, Honey Child. What do you want to know?"

"There was a ship called the *James A. Waltham,* here in 1939. That's right. There was civil war in Spain, with the Germans and the Italians helping the Rebels, and this ship was loaded with material for the Loyalists. What happened?"

"Wait a minute." Far down below in the great tower of inland New York, a man held a box which he had taken from a cabinet. The box was labeled "1939." The box contained films, microphotographs of the newspapers of that year. One by one the man stuck the films into a projection machine. He said at last, "The *James A. Waltham* slipped out at night when her captain disappeared, in the spring of 1939. The mate survived, having stayed ashore, waiting to locate the captain, who was believed kidnaped by person not in sympathy with what I read as Communists—whoever they were."

Amandus turned around.

"The *James A. Waltham* blew up in the bay which used to exist below the district of Manhattan. The ship was loaded with explosive material; someone dropped a burning cigarette in the hold; an assistant engineer discovered the fire while he was looking for a place to take a nap; he reported, and there was time to radio. The S O S calls were answered by the government and the private concerns existing then, but the ship must have blown up. The *James A.* was an oil-burner, and nothing was found but a patch of oil where the *James A.* was going to head out to sea, with or without the blessing of the U. S. A. The old lady's plates had been scattered across the water every which way; no survivors. Want any more?"

"Ask him what time she blew up—the exact time," Amandus ordered hoarsely.

"The explosion was seen at two minutes past midnight," same the prompt answer, "and was followed by a noise like an arsenal going up. Anything else? O. K."

Three thousand years ago at two minutes past midnight, tonight, the ship had gone to smithereens with all on board. If it hadn't been for the millionth chance, Amandus would have been on deck. He said to the girl: "You must have something to do. Go away. I want to think."

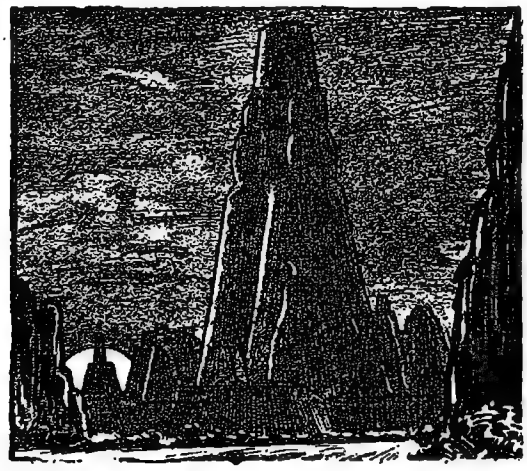
"I'm to stay with you."

"Go into one of the other rooms, then."

She left reluctantly and sat down on the edge of the bed, watching him. Amandus paced the living room gloomily, cursing his luck. Back there in 1939 he would have been a dead man, but this was practically as bad. He was a prisoner; he could not go and come as he pleased, nor had he any use for this girl who had been assigned to

him. They were going to "readjust" him, make him conform to their confounded lousy average.

Amandus was too old a dog to learn new tricks. Independence was his god. He was ocean-going, and at sea he was the law, the supreme authority on his own ship. But now he was a nonentity, merely a guinea pig for Davency to work on. According to his specifications there was no longer such a thing as a ship, and the very ocean was missing from the maps. Bridges connecting the continents! Hideous!



THE AFTERNOON sun was hitting the tower broadside now. At dinner time a tray was brought in, just as food is brought to a prisoner in a cell for his first few days in prison. The young man who carried the tray inquired: "Are you the new one? What year?"

"1939, squirt," Amandus growled.

"That so? I'm a 2937er, myself. Been here two years now. Got whisked right off the campus of Midwestern University the day of graduation."

"What's that to me?"

"Don't get huffy, pop," the kid recommended. "They'll hammer you down to the right size and make you like it. Take me, for instance. I had six years of law, a job waiting for me in the biggest firm in Chicago, and a promise of getting my name lettered on the door inside of two years. I was bright, see? Hell, I'm still bright, but what am I doing? I'm a waiter. The lawyers in this tower have a guild, and they won't let any more in. They've got a long waiting list, and I'm at the bottom of it. Isn't that a kick in the pants?"

"It is. Say, didn't they have any hair in 2937?"

"Sure. I had curly hair, and the girls were nuts about it. There's something wormy about the climate now; no winters or anything. Bet you that you'll be bald as a football inside of six months."

"No."

"Yes; absolutely."

"I mean I'm not betting. Beat it, youngster; this food is getting cold."

"O. K., pop. If you get hungry or thirsty later on, just buzz the kitchen. See you at breakfast."

The waiter lingered in the doorway, eying Rudolf's girl. He remarked, "Hm-m-m— Nice pair of legs there, sister."

At about ten thirty the girl went to bed with all the assurance of her being Amandus' legal wife. He gave her one horrified glance because he was taken by surprise, and after that kept his

back turned. He was so embarrassed he could have died. She called to him: "Come to bed, Amandus. It's late."

"Do I have to?"

"I have to report in the morning. If I lie about it, they'll know. If you don't come to bed, it will mean that I'm not satisfactory and I'll lose my rating."

"They ought to be ashamed of themselves!" he exclaimed. "Damned if I will!"

She began to cry, and he growled "All right, all right. But wait a while I'm still doing some thinking."

She went to sleep with tears beading her eyelashes, as inviting a morsel as his eyes gazed upon in all his travels. There would be no more traveling.

He looked out the window, and even the stars didn't look right. In three thousand years, of course, there might be a little distortion in the constellations. Orion's belt was slipping.

Midnight. If this were 1939, the *James A. Waltham* was due to go up in thunder in two minutes. If it hadn't been for the stink of disinfectant in his cabin, he would have been aboard. He was as much a part of that ship as her engines. He loved the old tub with a deep and true masculine love.

On second thought, he *was* aboard.

The girl awakened with a start and cried: "Amandus!"

Then she sprang from the bed wide-awake and sprinted to the window. She leaned out and screamed with all her might, "Amandus!" as though a call sent after him, with whatever speed of terror, could ever catch him and bring him back.

For he had swung his hairy legs over the window sill and given himself a strong push into space. He was now going down like a shot and picking up speed all the time. Some of the windows in the tower were lighted, and some were not, but in a couple of seconds the line of windows melted together to form a continuous streak of illumination. The breeze got stiff. In a jiffy, practically, it became a hurricane, a wind of a velocity that never existed on earth. From a whoop its voice turned into a witch's scream, scouring his flesh like sandpaper.

He had his watch in his hand, and by squinting mightily he was able to read the time. He glanced below, and the first terrace jutting out from the tower was going to receive him, as well as he could gauge it, at just about the split second of the *James A.'s* blowing up in the lower Bay. The tradition was as natural to him as the beat of his heart—the master going down with his ship, with no regrets and without any longing.

This advertisement is not intended to offer alcoholic beverages for sale or delivery in any state or community where the advertising, sale or use thereof is unlawful.

DANGER IN THE DARK

By L. RON HUBBARD

DANGER IN THE DARK

—bases a story on the authentic legend of vast Tadamona—the shark-god of the Islands.

L. Ron Hubbard

BILLY NEWMAN looked wearily at the apathetic face and needed no fine physician to tell him that he gazed upon death. For all its flat nose and thick lips and narrow brow, it was—or had been—pleasant, always filled with happiness as only the face of the simple can be. Osea had been a good boy. He had trudged stout-heartedly after his fellah mahstah, carrying heavy loads through the thickest of jungle on the hottest of days, through the thundering rains and the parching droughts. Osea would trudge no more. His machete, and the artistry with which he used it, could avail him nothing now against this unseen enemy—the Red Plague.

Fifteen hundred miles to the north and west lay Manila; but no frail dugout prow could breast that distance, much less traverse it in time to bring relief to Kaisan Isle. Fifteen hundred miles away and no steamer would stop for another six months; and even if a lugger put in, the one word, smallpox, would drive the vessel seaward again as fast as the trade winds blow.

Osea was dying. Billy Newman sat beside the bunk and wondered how many hours or how many days would pass before the witch doctor would have to bury him—Osea and those others down in the village who were even now fighting with their last gasps to live.

Billy Newman had never before felt so lonely—and he had had aloneness as his constant companion it seemed for all his days. Futility weighed down upon his slender shoulders and bowed them. His small face, which tried to be stronger in its possession of a thin, silken mustache, showed how many hours it had been since last he had slept. The only thing he had to encourage him in this was that he himself had long ago been filled brimming with the antitoxin. Perhaps it was still strong enough to keep him from getting the disease. But he had no real concern for himself in any event. These people, already wasted by the ravages of Spain and the white man's unhealthy civilization, hardly deserved the gruesome tricks fate played upon them. And to think of their laughter being stilled forever was more than Billy Newman could bear.

He had no slightest inkling of the source of the disease. The last ship in had left six months before, and certainly it had had a clean bill of health. Kaisan, at the southern end of the Robber Islands, was too small to merit more than a yearly call of a small tramp. There was no reason for more. Kaisan, like ten thousand of its brothers, offered little or no inducement to trade. When it rained one swam rather than walked. And when the rains went away the land withered and parched. Copra, these last few years, had cost more to grow than its selling price and of other crops: it raised none.

Billy wondered dully why he had ever come here. He knew but he had not energy enough just then to recall the

answer. Through a lucky gold strike in Luzon he had amassed eight thousand dollars, and—he had thought it was still good luck—he had been told that he could buy Kaisan for six thousand. He had bought.

Sitting there, waiting dispiritedly for Osea to die, he mulled over his arrival. At first he had laughed about it, not wishing to appear daunted by such nonsense. But now he well remembered what the fleeing seller had said.

THE GERMAN had stood on the beach, eagerly watching his dunnage being loaded into a longboat. His fat, sun-fried face was filled with a glee which had long been foreign to it—but with a nervousness, too, as though he expected, even at this last instant, to be struck down where he stood.

"Goot-by, goot-by," he said for the hundredth time. "Py colly, Newman, I wish you all der luck I got—which ain't so much. But py tamn, Newman, you vatch yourself, you hear? You look ouit. Don't pull no funny pizness I got mein dollars, and now I don't vant to leave you mitout telling you to vatch it. Ven I get to Manila I von't say noddings. I von't breathe a void abouit it. I ain't no svindler. And ven I get around I vill tell dem for you that you'll take six t'ousand dollars for der place. Maybe next year, py colly, ven der steamer cooms, it brings a buyer. I'll do not, Newman, I ain't no svindler."

"Maybe I won't want to sell," said Billy with a smile, surveying the white beach and the pleasant house and the native village and hearing the drums going to welcome him.

"Hah! Maybe you von't want to sell. Captung, you listen at him."

"I heard him," said the ship captain, grinning. "But I hope I bring you a buyer when I come just the same. And, more'n that—'cause I ain't so tough as I'm painted—I hope we'll find you alive."

"If you mean these people may turn on me—" began Billy."

"The people?" said the German. "No, py Gott, dem fellers ain't goin' to hurt you none. Dem fellers is fine fellers, py colly."

"What is wrong, then?" persisted Billy.

"Vell—" the German looked searchingly at him. "No, py Gott, you'll find it out for yourself. You von't belief it anyvay even if I dell you."

"That's a comfort," said Billy. "If I won't believe it, maybe it isn't so."

"Oh, it's so all right," said the captain. "At least, Hans here is the first live and kicking white man we've pulled out of here in eight years—and that's how long I've been on this run. You'll find the rest of them over in the native cemetery with the gugus—and there are more dead natives around here than live ones by a hell of a ways. He means about Tadamona. That's what seems to get 'em."

"Who?"

"Tadamona. He's the boss spirit around here. About seventy-five feet tall. If you see him or displease him, he either makes the plague come or he blows the place around with a typhoon."

"Oh," said Billy, grinning broadly. "If I didn't know these islands better . Why, hell's bells, gentlemen, there isn't an island in the Pacific that hasn't its seventy-five-foot spirit. But I've never happened to meet one." He chuckled. "I thought you were talking about something real there for a while."

The captain and Hans had exchanged a glance and a shrug. They gravely took their final leave of him and then put off in the longboat to go geysering through the reef surf and out toward the steamer. By their heads Billy could see that they were talking dolorously about him. And there he had been left in a circle of baggage while the village chiefs in all their grass and feathers had marched

down to acknowledge his leadership. He noted that they seemed to be in very good practice.

BUT STILL he was not going to be caught believing in such nonsense. The plague was the plague and nothing more. It had leaped, it was true, from nowhere, and before it would depart a good hundred of the two thousand would mark its path with white gravestones. Plague was plague. The villain was a small microbe, not a seventy-five foot, wholly mythical god.

The medicine drums were beating wearily and another, greater drum had commenced to boom with a hysteria which spoke of breaking nerves. The slither and slap of bare feet sounded upon Billy's veranda, and he straightened up to see that Wanoa and several lesser chiefs had come.

They greeted him with deep bows, their faces stiff to hide the terror within them.

"Hafa?" said Billy, giving it the "What's the matter" intonation.

"We come to seek your help," said Wanoa.

"I have done all I can," replied Billy, "but if you think what little medicine I have may stave off any new case—" he got slowly to his feet and reached mechanically for his topi, although it was already night.

"Medicine does no good," said Wanoa with dignity. "We have found it necessary to use strong means." He paused, cutting the flow of his Chamorro off short, as though he realized that what he was about to say would not go well with the mahstah.

"And?" said Billy, feeling it somehow.

"We turn back to old rite. Tonight we sacrifice young girl to Tadamona. Maybe it will be that he will turn away his anger—"

"A young girl?" gasped Billy. "You mean you're going to kill—"

"We are sorry. It is necessary. Long time ago priests come. They tell us about fellah Mahstah, Jesus Christ. We say fine. Brenby island got nothing but crosses... Tadamona is boss god Kaisan. Tadamona does not like to be forgotten. For a long time he slept. And then he see no sacrifices coming any more. He get angry. For thirty years we get no rest. We get sick, all the best people die, the crops are bad, the typhoons throw our houses down. Then white men here get plenty power, and Tadamona jealous and not like. Things get worse and worse. Tadamona no like white man, because white man say he is boss. Tadamona is boss."

"You can't do this," said Billy quietly. "I won't let you murder—"

"We not murder anybody," said Wanoa. "Christina say she happy to die if people get saved."

"Christina! Why, she . . . she's a mission girl! You're lying! She's half white! She would never consent to such a thing!"

Wanoa made a beckoning motion at the door, and Christina came shyly inside to stand with downcast face.

Billy walked toward her and placed his hand on her shoulder. Very often these last months he had watched her and wondered why he should go on forever alone. He would spend the rest of his life here, and Christina—she had that fragile beauty of the mestiza, beauty enough to turn the heads of most white men.

"You consented to this?" said Billy.

She nodded, not looking at him.

"Christina, you know something of white ways. You know what you have been taught. This Tadamona—why, he is nothing but airy mist. He is a superstition born out of typhoons and sickness and the minds of men who know little. Tadamona does not exist, except in your imagination, and your death could do nothing to drive off this plague. You would only add another gravestone in

the cemetery, and all the village would weep for you when the disease went on unabated." And, as she did not seem to be listening, he raised his voice with sudden fury. "You fools! Your island god doesn't live! He never did live, and he never will! Give me this week and I'll stop this plague! Obey my orders and it will take no more of your people! Tadamona! Damn such a rotten idea!"

THEY stared at him with shocked attitudes, then glancing uneasily out into the darkness.

"You must not speak so," said Christina in a hushed voice. "He he will come for you."

"How can he come for me if he doesn't exist?" cried Billy.

"You have seen the footprints in the rock," said Wanoa.

"A trick of lava!" shouted Billy. "No man or god has feet ten feet long!"

"You have heard him grumbling in the caverns of the point," said Wanoa.

"A trick of the sea in hollow coral!"

"You have seen where he has torn up palms by the roots," persisted Wanoa.

"They were ready to fall at the slightest breeze. I tell you, you can't do this! Tadamona is in your heads, and only in your heads, do you understand? If he lives, why haven't I seen him? Why?"

"He is too cunning for that," said Wanoa. "And to see him, to look him full in the face, is to die. Those of our people who have seen him have been found dead, unmarked, in the streets. The wise ones here never stir about after midnight."

"Bah! If he exists let him come and show himself to me! Let him walk up that path and call on me!"

They shrank back away from him as though expecting him to fall dead on the instant. Even Christina moved until his hand fell from her arm.

He was tired again. He felt so very alone and so small. "You can't do this, Christina. Give me a week and I'll stop this plague. I promise it. If I do not, then do what you like. But give me that."

"More people will die," said Christina. "I am not afraid."

"It is the white blood in her," said Wanoa. "It will quiet Tadamona. In a week, we will lose many, many more."

Billy walked up and down the grass mat for minutes. He was weary unto death himself, and these insistent voices bored like awls into his skull. Again he flared:

"So a week is too much to give me?"

"You have had a week," said Wanoa impassively.

Billy faced them, his small face flushed under the flickering huricane lantern, the wind from the sea stirring his silky blond hair. For the moment he filled his narrow jacket completely. "Yes, damn you, I've had a week! A week obstructed by your yap-yap-yap about Tadamona. If a week is too much, how many days?"

"One day," said Wanoa. "Not many people die in one day."

"One day?" cried Billy. "What—All right," he said, jacket emptying again. "One day. And when that is through, I suppose—" He glanced at Christina and saw that she would hold to her word then.

Wanoa made a motion for the others to leave, and then he walked slowly after them down the path to the beach. Once Christina stopped and glanced toward the house and Billy, seeing her, looked up into the sky as though help could be found there.

"One day," he muttered to himself. "A lot of chance I have to stop that in one day. They're fools. They're all fools. Tadamona! By God, if I could get my hands on him once—" And then, stumbling toward his bedroom, he stopped and laughed shakily. "If I don't watch myself, I'll be believing it, too."

Osea, seeing and hearing nothing, lay on the couch. Billy covered him against the evening chill and then, finding no reason to maintain his vigil, dropped under the mosquito netting of his own bunk fully clothed. Presently he slept.

TADAMONA, God of Jungle. Ageless as thought itself. Tadamona, seventy feet from toe to crown, with the face of a shark and the deadliness of the barracuda. Tadamona, childishly simple and childishly cruel. Jealous he had once been even of his own son and before such wrath the son had fled, leaving Tadamona to bring ill luck to Kaisan in all his lonely majesty. Tadamona had left his footprints in cold lava that men might see his size. Great, five-toed prints, measuring ten feet, having every sworl and arch. One gazed upon Tadamona and sickened and died. One forgot to placate him and the typhoons came. One neglected to offer him fish and the next time at sea the banca sank, its owner never to be seen again.

And out on the long point, whose sheer cliffs disdainfully reared high above the long Pacific swell, there was a monstrous cave, a full hundred feet from floor to roof, a thousand feet from entrance to entrance. Men said it was there. No man had courage enough to make certain.

Tadamona, the awful and fearsome god of Kaisan, walked beside the sea that night, dwarfing the royal palms at his sides, stepping on and crushing native bancas, too small to be noticed.

And Billy Newman slept uneasily and dreamed awful things, hearing in the deepest of his slumber the hoarse breathing of Osea, the boy who would no longer trot so happily upon his fella mahstah's heels.

The moon had ridden down the sky, masked by the frightened clouds which fitfully blocked its lights. The palm fronds rattled together like old bones in a weird, unholy dance. The shifting shadow patterns changed upon the veranda. Billy Newman stirred restively.

He did not know what woke him. But he was awake and one hand was clutched around the clammy butt of his automatic and his gaze was riveted upon the window, seen thinly through the mosquito netting.

He waited, hardly daring to breathe. He could see nothing—yet. He could hear nothing—yet. But he knew, without knowing how he knew, that something moved out there in the moonlight—something ominous and horrible.

At last he saw a shadow sweep across his floor. He tightened his grip on the gun. The shadow was as tall as a man and it moved without the slightest sound. Billy raised his gun, feverishly telling himself that this was some vengeful Chamorro come to settle a fancied score.

The mosquito net quivered uncertainly, plucked by a fumbling hand. Billy, inside the glowing white of it, felt as though he lay in his coffin.

The end of the net raised slowly, still uncertainly, as an elephant might push it out of the way with his trunk. The shadow Billy Newman had seen was now over him, too high over him to be a man. And now thick stumps like fingers, each one as tall as a man in itself, slid under the net and groped. Billy recoiled from the chill touch, as though they were snakes. The movement brought him to himself. The automatic in his hand he jammed straight into the horny flesh. With the rapidity of hysteria he pulled the trigger and seven thundering flashes lit the room.

The hand flinched a very little and then, with savage, crushing strength, fastened upon Billy. The net was ripped away. The hand withdrew, banging Billy against the sill.

His staring eyes took in a horrible sight. A grotesque face with seven rows

of teeth hovered over him, weirdly haloed by the moon. The thing got to its feet, crushing down a royal palm. Billy, inverted, stared at the earth far below, at his house which was suddenly so small.

The thing marched soundlessly down the beach, heading for the point which went out to meet the sea.

The world began to spin for Billy. He was quivering and sick, overcome by the awful stench of this thing and by the height and the doubt as to his fate. The automatic spun around his nerveless finger and dropped down to the beach. The last thing his eyes saw, as they rolled sickly into his head, was the thing sucking upon its injured finger, much as a man removes small splinters from his flesh.

After that Billy closed his eyes and fought the terror which surged up to engulf his reason. He knew now why men died when they saw this thing. It would be so easy to lie inert and let his own life ebb. It would be a relief to die.

MINUTES later, the shock of a short fall brought him to himself. He crouched instantly, staring about him, conscious, at first, only of shadowy shapes which loomed in a crimson haze. Then his glance rose, up and up, and he again found Tadamona, seated down upon a giant boulder and backed by the soaring height of the cavern. The rows of teeth in that shark face gleamed redly in the eerie light, and the hands upheld the head in an attitude of consideration.

Billy flashed his glance around the place to discover an exit. There were two, but long before he could hope to reach them this thing would stop him. He sank back, only to tense again on the discovery that he was thirty feet from the floor, precariously perched on a narrow ledge of coral.

A low, muttering sound came to him and mystified him until he reasoned that it was the surf beating through the hollow point. A smell of decay saturated the air about him, and he traced it to piles of fish bones scattered all around.

He peered down and, then, between the thing's huge feet, he found the source of the light, a glowing, bubbling pool of molten stuff which sent up sulphurous vapors to wreathe the awful shape.

Tadamona was studying him. The lidless eyes were filled more with curiosity than anything else, but the glance could have been likened to the gaze of a beast interested in its soon-to-be-devoured prey.

It had not occurred to Billy that this thing might be able to speak, and when it did he was so startled that it took seconds for the gist of the words to sink through his terror.

"You are the white fellah mahstah," said Tadamona, his voice making the cave shiver in echo. His words were ancient Chamorro and Billy understood them well.

"You are the white fellah mahstah," repeated Tadamona. "Tonight, I am told, you said that you did not believe in god or devil. Tonight, they say, you sent word for me to come if I lived at all. Tonight, they say, you boasted that you were greater than all old gods."

Billy was fighting for calmness.

"You say you stop the sickness," continued Tadamona. "Perhaps you can also stop the storms, cast down the forests and raise them anew. But I see no great man. I see a weak fellah mahstah no bigger than a child. I see a man full of empty boasting and no reverence for the old gods."

"What are you going to do with me?" said Billy.

"It is that I am thinking about," replied Tadamona. "You must be quiet." Again he clasped his chin in a mammoth hand and regarded his game. Thought was so foreign to that sluggish brain,

He could see nothing yet—but he knew something moved out there in the moonlight—something ominous and huge—

that one could almost see the slow chain of reason progress.

At last he said: "I am going to kill you. You have said that you have power greater than mine. If you have such power, you would have shown it before now, therefore you lie. You have boasted and your boasts are all lies and

so I am going to kill you."

Billy tried to buck up. "You are going to kill me, because you are afraid of me."

The effect was sudden and savage. Tadamona almost shook down the cave with his thunder. "Afraid? Afraid of you—more of a child than a man? *Afraid?*" And then his rage went swiftly into laughter and again the cave rocked as he sent forth peal after peal, holding his quaking sides. Finally he again grew calm. The laugh had been humorless for all the display, and the sound of it had driven Billy into dull fury.

"I am afraid of you?" said Tadamona. "I, who have ruled jungle and sea for as many years as the world is old? You come, you say you are a god, you say you can stop my sicknesses in one day. . You have lied and so you will die—"

"I tell you," howled Billy, "you are afraid. "If you thought me less dangerous, you would not bother with me. When the people know that you took me and killed me, they will know, too, that you did it out of jealousy and fear. I have told them that I would stop the sickness—"

"An empty boast, white fool. You are weak. You are nothing."

"I am strong enough to make you afraid. *You* are the coward. Where is your power over sickness? You have none. Where is your power over storm? That, too, is a lie. You are the liar and the boaster, not I. Else you would not have to kill me to show your superiority over me!"

Billy was beginning to gather his wits. It mattered little what he did or said. He could make his own position no worse. "Already you understand that you lie," he cried into the thing's face. "The Chamorro, when he sees you, falls down in death. I am still alive. Only looking on you, can never kill me. My medicine and my magic are stronger than yours."

Tadamona again stared thoughtfully at him, and then reached out a tree trunk of a finger and stirred him up experimentally, almost knocking him from the ledge. The effort Billy made to keep his hold amused the brute and put him into a better frame of mind.

"You have greater magic than mine," he mocked. "You shriek in terror that I am afraid of you. You are funny. The people think you are a great man. You have told them that you are greater than I am. Very well, white fellah mahstah, there you see the entrance to this place. You will go. You will return to the house from which I took you. Shortly I shall bring my sickness. I shall bring my storm. When I have finished neither man nor tree shall stand aright upon this island. Nothing will live. And, before they die, they will know that you lied. Go."

Billy stood in astonishment.

"Go!" said Tadamona insistently. "Tomorrow we shall match our magic. And I shall prove to you before you die how much you have lied."

Billy waited for no more urging. He scrambled down off the ledge and sprinted for the entrance to the cavern and, as he dashed through and up the great passageway which led to the air, he could hear Tadamona laughing, like a typhoon in the palms behind him. And the relief at being free was completely engulfed in the despair at his own helplessness.

THE PALE FACE of the moon was frightened behind the swift sweep of racing clouds. Shadows restively leaped into being and vanished along the rough trail, making the overwrought Billy feel that a thousand smaller demons lay in ambush at every turn. But when he had reached the whitely paved cart road which ended at his bungalow, the lessened strain gave him a moment's clear

thought, and he realized, with the suddenness of a bullet, that he had sold out the entire island for the sake of a few more hours of life. He had bought his momentary respite in terrible coin and unless he found that thousandth chance to avert this disaster, the lives of all were upon his head. He alone had goaded Tadamona into such vengeful folly.

Exhausted and shaking, he reached his veranda and fumbled his way through the dark front room to find a light for the lamp. The leaping yellow flame gave him spirit and returned courage. He even laughed a little and then checked it for fear it was hysteria in borning.

This was all, clearly, the most exquisite madness that could happen to a man. And, before five minutes had passed, Billy Newman walked around the table and threw himself in a chair and said aloud: "What a silly dream that was."

And, for the moment, it seemed very like a dream. He could almost recall waking up and walking in here for a calming cigarette. Nerves made nightmares and that was all there was to it. He poured himself a small drink, saying that he would take it off and then return to bed and calmer sleep. But with the glass halfway to his lips, it occurred to him that he should look in upon Osea. Maybe the boy would come out of the coma after all.

He got up and walked back to his bedroom, picking up the lamp on his way. The leaping light played for a moment on the awful face of the boy. No, Osea was still on the threshold of death, beyond any help but God's. Billy lowered the lamp, feeling very tired. The dream had not changed poor Osea's condition.

Billy returned to the living room, so deep in sadness that he failed to realize that there was now no wind in the palms outside. He did not discover the lack for several minutes and when he did, he gave a start as though some one had made a great noise.

No wind. That was strange. At this time of year that wind never failed. And for months the clatter of fronds had been a ceaseless undertone to everything heard. It was so incredible that he went out on the veranda to find out whether he had suddenly become deaf. But no, the fronds hung in limp despair but dimly seen in moonlight which was now yellow and somehow oppressive. It was hot, too. So hot that Billy's small mustache was thick with sweat, and his shirt was glued to his skin.

He started back into the house when the glint of a glass stopped him. He raised the lamp to look at the face of his barometer. Three times he looked away and looked back again to make certain he was seeing right. But in the last few minutes the needle had fallen *from thirty to twenty-seven and was still going down.* Anxiously he stared at the small notches which were marked: "Typhoon."

A horrible suffocation took hold of him. He whirled and raced down the steps to stop, holding the lamp high over his head. The pale glow extended just far enough for him to see the great footprints on the beach—footprints ten feet long!

He had caught at a straw. He had made believe it was a dream in the hope of brushing it all away. But here were the prints; there was the glass. Already Tadamona's awful power had reached out to engulf the island.

Billy felt as though something was about to snap in his mind. Up until now, even when in the presence of the thing, he had half believed it to be a nightmare. But now he was awake and the entire thing was so.

He would get help. He would rouse the village. He would make them fight and destroy Tadamona forever. Some-

how he would have to overcome their terror—for if he did not, dawn would find not a living soul on Kaisan.

HE FLED through the palms toward the village and, as he drew near the shadowy shapes of the thatched huts, he could hear restlessness and moaning. The largest one, in the center of the village, formerly the long house and once a Christian church, was now the home of Wanoa. And Billy was convinced that once Wanoa, that sturdy warrior, completely understood that it was either death by storm and plague or death in battle, he would certainly choose the latter.

Billy hammered loudly upon the door and all within went silent. When nobody came, he shouted: "Open up! It's your fellah mahstah!"

Wanoa's impressive face showed in a dark rectangle of window which was cautiously opened. Wanoa studied his visitor for some time before he consented to unbolt the door.

Billy burst into the bare-floored room, still holding his lamp. It was in his throat to shout out his news, but the sight he saw there stopped him. Five people—all the members of the chief's household—lay along the far wall. A few hours before only one had been ill, but now all five were ashen!

"What is this?" cried Billy.

Wanoa's tone was hostile. "Tonight you say you stop sickness. Tonight you forbid sacrifice to Tadamona. And now all but maybe ten in whole village sick. You have spoken evilly. The god is punishing us all."

Billy, still on the verge of stating his business, felt a clammy terror, held by the rest of them, enter into himself. He heard a sudden movement at the door and was so on edge that he whirled and almost spilled his lamp.

It was Christina who had seen his coming. Gone was the shy, delicate beauty Billy had always known. Her eyes blazed with hatred and the scorn in her voice was like thrown acid.

"*You* forbade the rites! *You* have caused this to come. And now the sea lies motionless and waiting. The wind has stopped. The village is dying, and only a fool would not know that a typhoon is at hand. This is the end of Kaisan and you, wretched white man, have caused its downfall!"

It was so true that Billy had no answer. He stared at Christina, half of him detached and astonished at the unmasked savagery in the woman, at the strength which he did not at all disapprove.

"You are right," he said in a low voice. "I have caused this, but now I have come for help. I have seen the god"—there was a sharp intake of breath and all eyes, the many which now peered in at the door, grew wide upon him—"I have seen the god and I know where he is to be found. With enough men it may be possible to kill him—"

"You have seen him and are alive?" said Wanoa.

"With enough men!" mocked Christina. "All the men of the island, armed as your white soldiers are armed, could not even injure Tadamona. But we have no arms and our men are all ill. Because of you, we shall die!"

Billy saw that she struck the pitch for the others. He saw men in the door with hard hands on their machetes. It would take but very little to rouse them to murder him.

"I understand that now," said Billy. "I did not think. My mind was frozen. But now I have a plan. If only a few will help me, we may yet save this place from destruction."

His words fell into the ominous silence which waited for the storm. Nervously he spoke again. "In an outhouse near my bungalow is stored the dynamite we have used for clearing. There are a dozen cases still left. The point where the thing lives is hollow from the wear

of the sea, and the shore end of it shows evidence of connection with Mount Kinea above. With help I can place the dynamite on the shore end and set it off. There is enough to break through the crust and perhaps cause the lava pools to explode. It is true that everyone will die before dawn. But isn't it better to die trying, than like whimpering women in these huts?"

"It cannot succeed!" said Christina. "I know nothing of your dynamite, but I have seen the power of Tadamona. You can avail nothing against it."

"I can try," said Billy.

"And we can refuse," said Christina. "The few who are left may live even yet. The sick are too weak to help. Go back to your bungalow and dwell upon the calamity which you have brought to us."

It was well that she said he was to go. The men at the door fell away to let him pass when, just as swiftly they would have cut him down.

He paused, looking back at her, the light of his lantern making her smooth, satin skin glow with an almost luminous light. "Whether I have help or not, I must try. There is but little time left." He faced about and strode down the lane between the huts and back through the jungle which opened out again upon his bungalow.

THE FUTILITY of the gesture he planned lay like lead in his heart, but he could not stand inactivity. He went to the hut, which housed the machinery of the island, and climbed up into the ancient, tanklike truck which had seen a dozen years of service before it had ever rolled a wheel on Kaisan. It started reluctantly, and he eased it out and around to the roadway which led to the powder shack.

He left the engine running and unlocked the door. He was too discouraged to be careful and set his lamp where it would shed the best light. He counted the cases and found that he had three more than he had thought. But still, it was little enough for a job at which howitzers themselves might have failed.

The electric blasting machine was rusty and damp, and the handle was difficult to pull up. He took it out into the moonlight and after exerting much force, was able to raise it. He thrust it down again, watching for the end wires to spark. It required several tries before he at last saw their feeble flicker. It was inviting a misfire to use it at all, but all his caps were electric and of the kind used in damp metal mines. He put the machine in the truck and returned to begin on the dynamite.

He had carried about half the boxes outside when his eye was arrested by another type of container, and he stopped to pick it up. Against the chance that the tramp steamer might sometime be forced to unload at night, a long dead owner had purchased a gross of magnesium flares. Billy put several inside his shirt. For lack of other firing equipment he might find a way to press them into service, as their ignition caps might serve where the electric machine failed.

He picked up another case and carried it outside. Startled by a movement beside the truck, he stopped. And then, with relief, he saw that it was Christina.

She had shed the prosaic mission costume that her movements might be freer, replacing them with a sarong which closely molded her beautiful form. The eerie character of the moonlight gave her the appearance of a jungle cat.

"You had better go back to your hut," said Billy.

"Save your breath for work. It is barely possible that your plan may work."

He turned and pulled the rest of the dynamite from the shack, and then helped her fling it up into the body of the truck. He made it fast with some

old pieces of hemp, and then they climbed up to the seat. He eased the truck down the jungle-bordered trail. Its lights did not seem to have the power to penetrate this thickening, suffocating murk.

"It may stop him for a little while," said Christina. "If we are alive at dawn, we will have another day."

"How do you know that?"

"He has never been known to walk by day."

Billy looked up at the moon. Although there were no clouds, it was now almost hidden. The heat was so thick he found it very difficult to breathe after his exertions.

"This is all crazy mad," he said abruptly. "But when I tried to tell myself it was a dream, I found a barometer and his footprints and knew that I had really seen him. Sickness is caused by bacteria, and typhoons are too great a difference in high and low pressure areas. But it is impossible for all the village to become ill at once, and equally impossible for the storm to come on so suddenly."

"You are through laughing at us, then?"

"I have never laughed at you."

"The people believe something else. They know white men think they are gods, though they act as the lowest of men."

"I don't feel anything near a god right now," said Billy with a feeble attempt at a smile.

They drove up the cart road, and it was as though they were forced against a wall of sinuous substance which was reluctant to let them through.

"There is the point," he said at last.

She gazed at it without flinching. "You saw him and still live?"

"I saw him."

"Then, perhaps, I too can look upon him."

"Perhaps."

"Maybe he is not there."

"Maybe."

They forced the truck up the strangely bare jungle path, where no native feet ever trod. It labored on the ascent and then, caught at last by heavy vines, stopped.

"There is a cavern just ahead. I saw it as I came out of its cave."

"I see it," she said, walking in front and peering into the murk. She looked at the darker hole beyond and knew it for what it was. She came back to Billy and helped him with the boxes.

METHODICALLY they carried them to the cavern and lowered them down. One by one they placed and packed them, working with a slowness which was defiance in itself.

When they had done, they felt a stir in the air.

"The wind will be here in a moment," said Christina.

"Yes, I hear it."

He went back to the truck and took out the firing cable and the machine. He fitted caps into the sticks of the topmost box and then affixed the wire. He went back toward the truck and then beyond, letting out coil after coil. Finally he knelt and connected the blasting machine.

With Christina's help he piled stones and earth on top of the boxes. They were very quiet, unable to keep from watching the mouth of the cavern so short a distance from them.

Christina followed him back to the machine. The calm which she had so laboriously preserved was now beginning to crack.

"He has not come out. Perhaps he is not there at all!"

Billy again inspected his wires, saying nothing. The next instant, anything he might have said would have gone unheard. With a blast fully as loud as any dynamite explosion, the hurricane struck Kaisan. A torrent of stinging rain, lashed by the scream of the wind, bat-

tered them and blinded them. With a deafening thunder the sea rose up and crashed down upon the reef, snarling forward in its eagerness to claw the beaches.

Speech was impossible even at the distance of a foot. They gripped the earth, stunned by the ferocity of the attack, chilled by wave after wave of rain, each one of which left them half drowned. Not ten feet from them a giant royal palm vanished to leave a dark cavern of its own. The very stones streaked away from the path. The wind was full of pelting sticks and leaves and fronds, which left their bodies numb as from a flogging.

For ten minutes or more the first attack of the typhoon continued. Then there came a momentary lull, as though the great beast paused to take a proud survey of what he had done and then blast away again at the most stubborn centers of resistance.

In the instant of respite, Billy groped for Christina and found her shivering at his side. All the while she had been clinging hard to his shoulder, but that force was so small he had not felt it in the shock of wind and rain.

"There'll be nothing left of the island!" she wailed into his ear. "Blow up this place while we still have the calm!"

Billy got to his knees and placed both hands upon the handle. He thrust down with all his might. The ancient magneto whirred, the end of the plunger clanged against the breaker. Nothing happened. Billy fought the thing up again.

With redoubled fury the storm struck anew. He was torn from his grip on the handle and flung back against the earth. Dimly he saw Christina crawling toward him. She helped him breast the blast which swept up from the sea.

He braced himself and took the grips. Again he slammed the bar down.

In the countershock which followed, he lost Christina. The concussion sucked all the wind away for an instant and then the storm, angered, came howling back to pound him into the earth for such insolence. The explosion had been dull in the bedlam already loose, but through the medium of the ground, Billy felt a series of shakes and knew with a surge of triumph that the cavern was caving in.

Again the storm paused to draw its breath and Billy, feeling movement behind him, faced about as he hugged the earth to find Christina.

BUT it was not Christina. The thing went up like a tower into the sky. Billy sat back, staring upward and still upward, following the bulk of the two planted legs. He felt rather than saw the two gleaming eyes and the glistening rows of teeth.

"Tadamona!" he said, sickly.

The beast god grinned. The gale was hushed while he spoke. "You have the greater magic. You have stopped the people from dying, you have quelled the typhoon." The laughter rang from island peak to the sea and back again. "You have dropped the roof of a cavern, puny liar, and that is all. Look at your island! Remember how you found your people. It is an hour until dawn, and in that hour Kaisan's pygmy men will end their days. But you are not to watch their going. See, feel proud! I halt the storm for the instant it will take to break you in half and cast you into the sea."

Tadamona stooped down and the engulfing shadow of his hand darkened the earth about Billy. He scrambled back, leaping to his feet in a wild attempt to flee from the outstretched fingers. Ahead there was only the cavern, and that was now filled with rubble. There was no escape and Tadamona again sent the earth and sky rocking with his laughter to see such a vain struggle.

At the cavern, a few feet inside, Billy found a dead end. He whirled about

and suddenly the terror gave way to fury. He was suddenly released from the paralysis which had first been his at the sight of the monster and now he cried out insane, incoherent phrases at the advancing thing.

Tadamona knelt, crouching like a cat about to flick a mouse out of its hole. The clawed fingers drew close to Billy. Savagely he kicked at them, insensible to the pain he caused his own foot. Tadamona, unable to get a sure grip, knelt lower and peered closely with his luminous eyes.

Billy leaped behind a small pile of rocks, but the fingers only brushed them to one side as though they had been sand. With a final shriek of rage, Billy reached into his shirt and yanked out the, until now forgotten, magnesium flares. He bit off a cap with his teeth and hurled it at the face. The flare sparked and then blazed into brilliant white light.

Tadamona recoiled for an instant and then, with a horrifying fury of his own snatched at and captured Billy, hauling him forth. Billy had another flare, and it, too, he ignited and threw straight at the eyes of the thing.

Billy felt himself jerk high into the air and knew that he had been thrown. He saw the dark earth and the darker jungle god all mingled with the sky. And then he landed in a tangle of vines, and the world went black and sick. But he was too conscious of hovering death to succumb to senselessness. He reeled to his feet and, with every ounce of will power, followed through his last intention. With a rapidity of which he himself was not immediately conscious, he threw all the remaining flares at the gigantic bulk which had begun to grope anew for him.

One after the other the brilliant lights arced through the murk. There was an odor of singed hair in the wind. One after another the flares struck the path to send out their blinding glares which mounted in intensity as they burned.

Suddenly Tadamona was no longer searching for his quarry. With insane fury, holding both arms before his face, he was stamping at the flares. But their heat was too great for even his thick hide to stand, and he staggered back, blind in the light, howling in agony.

The savage whiteness of the light bathed the monster's entire hulk, lighting up the gleaming rows of teeth in the half-moon mouth, dragging out an agonized blaze from the awful eyes, glittering on the claws of hand and foot alike.

Billy stopped in amazement. He had hardly been conscious of his own actions. He had used the flares as the last, hopeless resort. But now a horrible thing was happening.

The thing seemed to melt. First there were no arms and then there was no face. The body became transparent to the moonlight which pierced the storm clouds and then, as Billy stared, the body was not there at all.

Far off, rising upward toward the overcast sky and dwindling there to nothing, a shriek went, went and vanished and was not heard again.

Billy was suddenly weak. He staggered out upon the path, floundering in the loose dust cast up by the explosion of his dynamite. One last flare burned and by its light he saw the two last prints of the giant, large and clear in the sand. He stared up from them, expecting to find the god still. But the sky was empty. The sky was empty and the moon was again showing through the tumbled clouds which fled into the west.

ALONE, he staggered down the trail. He passed his truck and walked on, well knowing himself to be too shaky to drive it. He reached the white cart road and floundered along it, dully hoping that Christina had fled to safety.

His bungalow had lights in it, but he did not comment upon it—he was still so dazed. He went up the walk and across the veranda and stopped, holding himself up with the door.

A boy was there, bustling about and very worried. The boy's face was perfectly clear. At a slight sound Billy made, Osea turned anxiously and then relief flooded his face.

"Mahstah! You b'long doctah house. How come walk about this time?"

Billy ran an exploratory hand over Osea's young face. There was no mark or abrasion upon it. He sank into a chair, and Osea pressed a glass of brandy upon him which he drank mechanically.

How long he sat there he was not sure, but when he looked up it was daylight.

It was daylight and Wanoa was respectfully waiting with his retinue upon the veranda.

"Well?" said Billy.

Wanoa looked uneasy. He cleared his throat and straightened himself until he was as tall as possible. "We come to see how you like new work schedule. We got plenty men now. Nobody sick on whole island. You say work-work and we work. You no make much pay, we not make much pay. We say do, we do. You say want, you get." It was evidently not the speech which he had rehearsed with flowery gestures and effusive thanks. That speech was in his bearing and his face but he was entirely too awed to voice it.

Billy nodded and the group withdrew to silently walk away from the house. But when they got to the beach, they suddenly raised their voices in joyful discourse and capered along as though they had been the children of the village instead of its most sacred elders.

Billy smiled and found that he felt amazingly good. He had just started to rise when he heard a thump just inside the door. He beheld Christina. She gave her bundle of belongings a further push with her foot, and then glared indignation at the astonished Osea.

"Go fix the fella mahstah's bed before you get what for!" she cried. "And you. What are you doing still up? You need sleep. Much sleep."

She walked swiftly through the room and into the kitchen where Billy presently heard her abusing the cook for not having a better breakfast.

"Bah, you are a fool!" Christina cried at the luckless chef. "You think just because he is a god, he doesn't have to eat?"

Billy gazed self-consciously at his worn shoes and then up to find Osea staring at him. Osea grinned suddenly and Billy, stretching comfortably, grinned back.

LOST—A PET HATE

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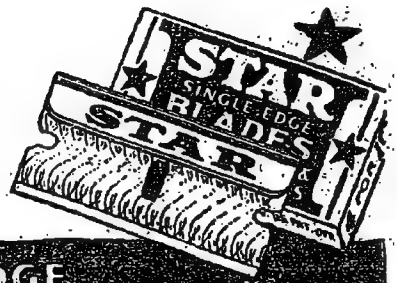

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THE CLOAK

By ROBERT BLOCH

THE CLOAK

The costumer assured him the cloak was genuine, of course—

By Robert Bloch

THE sun was dying, and its blood spattered the sky as it crept into its sepulcher behind the hills. The keening wind sent the dry, fallen leaves scurrying toward the west, as though hastening them to the funeral of the sun.

"Nuts!" said Henderson to himself, and stopped thinking.

The sun was setting in a dingy red sky, and a dirty raw wind was kicking up the half-rotten leaves in a filthy gutter. Why should he waste time with cheap imagery?

"Nuts!" said Henderson, again

It was probably a mood evoked by the day, he mused. After all, this was the sunset of Halloween. Tonight was the dreaded Allhallows Eve, when spirits walked and skulls cried out from their graves beneath the earth.

Either that, or tonight was just another rotten cold fall day. Henderson sighed. There was a time, he reflected, when the coming of this night meant something. A dark Europe, groaning in superstitious terror, dedicated this Eve to the grinning Unknown. A million doors had once been barred against the evil visitants, a million prayers mumbled, a million candles lit. There was something majestic about the idea, Henderson reflected. Life had been an adventure in those times, and men walked in terror of what the next turn of a midnight road might bring. They had lived in a world of demons and ghouls and elementals who sought their souls—and by Heaven, in those days a man's soul meant something. This new skepticism had taken a profound meaning away from life. Men no longer revered their souls.

"Nuts!" said Henderson again, quite automatically. There was something crude and twentieth-century about the coarse expression which always checked his introspective flights of fancy.

The voice in his brain that said "nuts" took the place of humanity to Henderson—common humanity which would voice the same sentiment if they heard his secret thoughts. So now Henderson uttered the word and endeavored to forget problems and purple patches alike.

He was walking down this street at sunset to buy a costume for the masquerade party tonight, and he had much better concentrate on finding the costumer's before it closed than waste his time daydreaming about Halloween.

His eyes searched the darkening shadows of the dingy buildings lining the narrow thoroughfare. Once again he peered at the address he had scribbled down after finding it in the phone book.

Why the devil didn't they light up the shops when it got dark? He couldn't make out numbers. This was a poor, run-down neighborhood, but after all—

Abruptly, Henderson spied the place across the street and started over. He passed the window and glanced in. The last rays of the sun slanted over the top of the building across the way and fell

directly on the window and its display. Henderson drew a sharp intake of breath.

He was staring at a costumer's window—not looking through a fissure into hell. Then why was it all red fire, lighting the grinning visages of fiends?

"Sunset," Henderson muttered aloud. Of course it was, and the faces were merely clever masks such as would be displayed in this sort of place. Still, it gave the imaginative man a start. He opened the door and entered.

The place was dark and still. There was a smell of loneliness in the air—the smell that haunts all places long undisturbed; tombs, and graves in deep woods, and caverns in the earth, and—

"Nuts."

What the devil was wrong with him, anyway? Henderson smiled apologetically at the empty darkness. This was the smell of the costumer's shop, and it carried him back to college days of amateur theatricals. Henderson had known this smell of moth balls, decayed furs, grease paint and oils. He had played amateur Hamlet and in his hands he had held a smirking skull that hid all knowledge in its empty eyes—a skull, from the costumer's.

Well, here he was again, and the skull gave him the idea. After all, Halloween night it was. Certainly in this mood of his he didn't want to go as a rajah, or a Turk, or a pirate—they all did that. Why not go as a fiend, or a warlock, or a werewolf? He could see Lindstrom's face when he walked into the elegant penthouse wearing rags of some sort. The fellow would have a fit, with his society crowd wearing their expensive Elsa Maxwell take-offs. Henderson didn't greatly care for Lindstrom's sophisticated friends anyway; a gang of amateur Noel Cowards and horsy women wearing harnesses of jewels. Why not carry out the spirit of Halloween and go as a monster?

HENDERSON stood there in the dusk, waiting for someone to turn on the lights, come out from the back room and serve him. After a minute or so he grew impatient and rapped sharply on the counter.

"Say in there! Service!"

Silence. And a shuffling noise from the rear, then—an unpleasant noise to hear in the gloom. There was a banging from downstairs and then the heavy clump of footsteps. Suddenly Henderson gasped. A black bulk was rising from the floor!

It was, of course, only the opening of the trapdoor from the basement. A man shuffled behind the counter, carrying a lamp. In that light his eyes blinked drowsily.

The man's yellowish face crinkled into a smile.

"I was sleeping, I'm afraid," said the man, softly. "Can I serve you, sir?"

"I was looking for a Halloween costume."

"Oh, yes. And what was it you had in mind?"

The voice was weary, infinitely weary. The eyes continued to blink in the flabby yellow face.

"Nothing usual, I'm afraid. You see, I rather fancied some sort of monster getup for a party— Don't suppose you carry anything in that line?"

"I could show you masks."

"No. I meant, werewolf outfits, something of that sort. More of the authentic."

"So. The *authentic*."

"Yes." Why did this old dunce stress the word?

"I might—yes, I might have just the thing for you, sir." The eyes blinked, but the thin mouth pursed in a smile. "Just the thing for Halloween."

"What's that?"

"Have you ever considered the possibility of being a vampire?"

"Like Dracula?"

"Ah—yes, I suppose—Dracula."

"Not a bad idea. Do you think I'm the type for that, though"

The man appraised him with that tight smile. "Vampires are of all types, I understand. You would do nicely."

"Hardly a compliment," Henderson chuckled. "But why not? What's the outfit?"

"Outfit? Merely evening clothes, or what you wear. I will furnish you with the authentic cloak."

"Just a cloak—is that all?"

"Just a cloak. But it is worn like a shroud. It is shroud-cloth, you know. Wait, I'll get it for you."

The shuffling feet carried the man into the rear of the shop again. Down the trapdoor entrance he went, and Henderson waited. There was more banging, and presently the old man reappeared carrying the cloak. He was shaking dust from it in the darkness.

"Here it is—the genuine cloak."

"Genuine?"

"Allow me to adjust it for you—it will work wonders, I'm sure."

The cold, heavy cloth hung draped about Henderson's shoulders. The faint odor rose mustily in his nostrils as he stepped back and surveyed himself in the mirror. The lamp was poor, but Henderson saw that the cloak effected a striking transformation in his appearance. His long face seemed thinner, his eyes were accentuated in the facial pallor heightened by the somber cloak he wore. It was a big, black shroud.

"Genuine," murmured the old man. He must have come up suddenly, for Henderson hadn't noticed him in the glass.

"I'll take it," Henderson said. "How much?"

"You'll find it quite entertaining, I'm sure."

"How much?"

"Oh. Shall we say five dollars?"

"Here."

The old man took the money, blinking, and drew the cloak from Henderson's shoulders. When it slid away he felt suddenly warm again. It must be cold in the basement—the cloth was icy.

The old man wrapped the garment, smiling, and handed it over.

"I'll have it back tomorrow," Henderson promised.

"No need. You purchased it. It is yours."

"But—"

"I am leaving business shortly. Keep it. You will find more use for it than I, surely."

"But—"

"A pleasant evening to you."

Henderson made his way to the door in confusion, then turned to salute the blinking old man in the dimness.

Two eyes were burning at him from across the counter—two eyes that did not blink.

"Good night," said Henderson, and closed the door quickly. He wondered if he were going just a trifle mad.

AT EIGHT, Henderson nearly called up Lindstrom to tell him he couldn't make it. The cold chills came the minute he put on the damned cloak, and when he looked at himself in the mirror his blurred eyes could scarcely make out the reflection.

But after a few drinks he felt better about it. He hadn't eaten, and the liquor warmed his blood. He paced the floor, attitudinizing with the cloak—sweeping it about him and scowling in what he thought was a ferocious manner. Damn it, he was going to be a vampire all right! He called a cab, went down to the lobby. The driver came in, and Henderson was waiting, black cloak furled.

"I wish you to drive me," he said, in a low voice.

The cabman took one look at him in the cloak and turned pale.

"Whazzat?"

"I ordered you to come," said Hen-

derson gutturally, while he quaked with inner mirth. He leered ferociously and swept the cloak back.

"Yeah, yeah. O. K."

The driver almost ran outside. Henderson stalked after him.

"Where to, boss—I mean, sir?"

The frightened face didn't turn as Henderson intoned the address and sat back.

The cab started with a lurch that set Henderson to chuckling deeply, in character. At the sound of the laughter the driver got panicky and raced his engine up to the limit set by the governor. Henderson laughed loudly, and the impressionable driver fairly quivered in his seat. It was quite a ride, but Henderson was entirely unprepared to open the door and find it slammed after him as the cabman drove hastily away without collecting a fare.

"I must look the part," he thought complacently, as he took the elevator up to the penthouse apartment.

There were three or four others in the elevator; Henderson had seen them before at other affairs Lindstrom had invited him to attend, but nobody seemed to recognize him. It rather pleased him to think how his wearing of an unfamiliar cloak and an unfamiliar scowl seemed to change his entire personality and appearance. Here the other guests had donned elaborate disguises—one woman wore the costume of a Watteau shepherdess, another was attired as a Spanish ballerina, a tall man dressed as Pagliacci, and his companion had donned a toreador outfit. Yet Henderson recognized them all; knew that their expensive habiliments were not truly disguises at all, but merely elaborations calculated to enhance their appearance. Most people at costume parties gave vent to suppressed desires. The women showed off their figures, the men either accentuated their masculinity as the toreador did, or clowned it. Such things were pitiful; these conventional fools eagerly doffing their dismal business

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suits and rushing off to a lodge, or amateur theatrical, or mask ball in order to satisfy their starving imaginations. Why didn't they dress in garish colors on the street? Henderson often pondered the question.

Surely, these society folk in the elevator were fine-looking men and women in their outfits—so healthy, so red-faced, and full of vitality. They had such robust throats and necks. Henderson looked at the plump arms of the woman next to him. He stared, without realizing it, for a long moment. And then, he saw that the occupants of the car had drawn away from him. They were standing in the corner, as though they feared his cloak and scowl, and his eyes fixed on the woman. Their chatter had ceased abruptly. The woman looked at him, as though she were about to speak, when the elevator doors opened and afforded Henderson a welcome respite.

What the devil was wrong? First the cab-driver, then the woman. Had he drunk too much?

Well, no chance to consider that. Here was Marcus Lindstrom, and he was thrusting a glass into Henderson's hand.

"What have we here? Ah, a bogyman!" It needed no second glance to perceive that Lindstrom, as usual at such affairs, was already quite bottle-dizzy. The fat host was positively swimming in alcohol.

"Have a drink, Henderson, my lad! I'll take mine from the bottle. That outfit of yours gave me a shock. Where'd you get the make-up?"

"Make-up? I'm not wearing any make-up."

"Oh. So you're not. How silly of me."

Henderson wondered if he were crazy. Had Lindstrom really drawn back? Were his eyes actually filled with a certain dismay? Oh, the man was obviously intoxicated.

"I'll . . . I'll see you later," babbled Lindstrom, edging away and quickly

turning to the other arrivals. Henderson watched the back of Lindstrom's neck. It was fat and white. It bulged over the collar of his costume and there was a vein in it. A vein in Lindstrom's fat neck. Frightened Lindstrom.

Henderson stood alone in the anteroom. From the parlor beyond came the sound of music and laughter; party noises. Henderson hesitated before entering. He drank from the glass in his hand—Bacardi rum, and powerful. On top of his other drinks it almost made the man reel. But he drank, wondering. What was wrong with him and his costume? Why did he frighten people? Was he unconsciously acting his vampire rôle? That crack of Lindstrom's about make-up, now—

Acting on impulse, Henderson stepped over to the long panel mirror in the hall. He lurched a little, then stood in the harsh light before it. He faced the glass, stared into the mirror, and saw nothing.

He looked at himself in the mirror, and there was no one there!

Henderson began to laugh softly, evilly, deep in his throat. And as he gazed into the empty, unreflecting glass, his laughter rose in black glee.

"I'M DRUNK," he whispered. "I must be drunk. Mirror in my apartment made me blurred. Now I'm so far gone I can't see straight. Sure I'm drunk. Been acting ridiculously, scaring people. Now I'm seeing hallucinations—or not seeing them, rather. Visions. Angels."

His voice lowered. "Sure, angels. Standing right in back of me, now. Hello, angel."

"Hello."

Henderson whirled. There she stood, in the dark cloak, her hair a shimmering halo above her white, proud face; her eyes celestial blue, and her lips infernal red.

"Are you real?" asked Henderson gently. "Or am I a fool to believe in miracles?"

"This miracle's name is Sheila Darrly, and it would like to powder its nose if you please."

"Kindly use this mirror through the courtesy of Stephen Henderson," replied the cloaked man, with a grin. He stepped back a ways, eyes intent.

The girl turned her head and favored him with a slow, impish smile. "Haven't you ever seen powder used before?" she asked.

"Didn't know angels indulged in cosmetics," Henderson replied. "But then there's a lot I don't know about angels. From now on I shall make them a special study of mine. There's so much I want to find out. So you'll probably find me following you around with a notebook all evening."

"Notebooks for a vampire?"

"Oh, but I'm a very intelligent vampire—not one of those backwoods Transylvanian types. You'll find me charming, I'm sure."

"Yes, you look like the sure type," the girl mocked. "But an angel and a vampire—that's a queer combination."

"We can reform one another," Henderson pointed out. "Besides, I have a suspicion that there's a bit of the devil in you. That dark cloak over your angel costume; dark angel, you know. Instead of heaven you might hail from my home town."

Henderson was flippant, but underneath his banter cyclonic thoughts whirled. He recalled discussions in the past; cynical observations he had made and believed.

Once, Henderson had declared that there was no such thing as love at first sight, save in books or plays where such a dramatic device served to speed up action. He asserted that people learned about romance from books and plays and accordingly adopted a belief in love at first sight when all one could

possibly feel was desire.

And now this Sheila—this blond angel—had to come along and drive out all thoughts of morbidity, all thoughts of drunkenness and foolish gazings into mirrors, from his mind; had to send him madly plunging into dreams of red lips, ethereal blue eyes and slim white arms.

Something of his feelings had swept into his eyes, and as the girl gazed up at him she felt the truth.

"Well," she breathed, "I hope the inspection pleases."

"A miracle of understatement, that. But there was something I wanted to find out particularly about divinity. Do angels dance?"

"Tactful vampire! The next room?"

Arm in arm they entered the parlor. The merrymakers were in full swing. Liquor had already pitched gaiety at its height, but there was no dancing any longer. Boisterous little grouped couples laughed arm in arm about the room. The usual party gagsters were performing their antics in corners. The superficial atmosphere, which Henderson detested, was fully in evidence.

It was reaction which made Henderson draw himself up to full height and sweep the cloak about his shoulders. Reaction brought the scowl to his pale face, caused him to stalk along in brooding silence. Sheila seemed to regard this as a great joke.

"PULL a vampire act on them," she giggled, clutching his arm. Henderson accordingly scowled at the couples, sneered horrendously at the women. And his progress was marked by the turning of heads, the abrupt cessation of chatter. He walked through the long room like Red Death incarnate. Whispers trailed in his wake.

"Who is that man?"

"We came up with him in the elevator, and he—"

"His eyes—"

"Vampire!"

"Hello, Dracula!" It was Marcus Lindstrom and a sullen-looking brunette in Cleopatra costume who lurched toward Henderson. Host Lindstrom could scarcely stand, and his companion in cups was equally at a loss. Henderson liked the man when sober at the club, but his behavior at parties had always irritated him. Lindstrom was particularly objectionable in his present condition—it made him boorish.

"M' dear, I want you t' meet a very dear friend of mine. Yessir, it being Halloween and all, I invited Count Dracula here, t'gether with his daughter. Asked his grandmother, but she's busy tonight at a Black Sabbath—along with Aunt Jemima. Ha! Count, meet my little playmate."

The woman leered up at Henderson.

"Oooh Dracula, what big eyes you have! Oooh, what big teeth you have! Ooooh—"

"Really, Marcus," Henderson protested. But the host had turned and shouted to the room.

"Folks, meet the real goods—only genuine living vampire in captivity! Dracula Henderson, only existing vampire with false teeth."

In any other circumstance Henderson would have given Lindstrom a quick, efficient punch on the jaw. But Sheila was at his side, it was a public gathering; better to humor the man's clumsy jest. Why not be a vampire?

Smiling quickly at the girl, Henderson drew himself erect, faced the crowd, and frowned. His hands brushed the cloak. Funny, it still felt cold. Looking down he noticed for the first time that it was a little dirty at the edges; muddy or dusty. But the cold silk slid through his fingers as he drew it across his breast with one long hand. The feeling seemed to inspire him. He opened his eyes wide and let them blaze. His mouth opened. A sense of dramatic

power filled him. And he looked at Marcus Lindstrom's soft, fat neck with the vein standing in the whiteness. He looked at the neck, saw the crowd watching him, and then the impulse seized him. He turned, eyes on that creasy neck—that wabbling, creasy neck of the fat man.

Hands darted out. Lindstrom squeaked like a frightened rat. He was a plump, sleek white rat, bursting with blood. Vampires liked blood. Blood from the rat, from the neck of the rat, from the vein in the neck of the squeaking rat.

"Warm blood."

The deep voice was Henderson's own.

The hands were Henderson's own.

The hands that went around Lindstrom's neck as he spoke, the hands that felt the warmth, that searched out the vein. Henderson's face was bending for the neck, and, as Lindstrom struggled, his grip tightened. Lindstrom's face was turning, turning purple. Blood was rushing to his head. That was good. Blood!

Henderson's mouth opened. He felt the air on his teeth. He bent down toward that fat neck, and then—

"STOP! That's plenty!"

The voice, the cooling voice of Sheila. Her fingers on his arm. Henderson looked up, startled. He released Lindstrom, who sagged with open mouth.

The crowd was staring, and their mouths were all shaped in the instinctive O of amazement.

Sheila whispered, "Bravo! Served him right—but you frightened him!"

Henderson struggled a moment to collect himself. Then he smiled and turned.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I have just given a slight demonstration to prove to you what our host said of me was entirely correct. I *am* a vampire. Now that you have been given fair warning, I am sure you will be in no further danger. If there is a doctor in the house I can, perhaps, arrange for a blood transfusion."

The O's relaxed and laughter came from startled throats. Hysterical laughter, in part, then genuine. Henderson had carried it off. Marcus Lindstrom alone still stared with eyes that held utter fear. *He* knew.

And then the moment broke, for one of the gagsters ran into the room from the elevator. He had gone downstairs and borrowed the apron and cap of a newsboy. Now he raced through the crowd with a bundle of papers under his arm.

"Extra! Extra! Read all about it! Big Halloween Horror! Extra!"

Laughing guests purchased papers. A woman approached Sheila, and Henderson watched the girl walk away in a daze.

"See you later," she called, and her glance sent fire through his veins. Still, he could not forget the terrible feeling that came over him when he had seized Lindstrom. Why?

Automatically, he accepted a paper from the shouting pseudo-newsboy. "Big Halloween Horror," he had shouted. What was that?

Blurred eyes searched the paper.

Then Henderson reeled back. That headline! It was an *Extra* after all. Henderson scanned the columns with mounting dread.

"Fire in costumer's . shortly after 8 p. m. firemen were summoned to the shop of . . flames beyond control completely demolished damage estimated at peculiarly enough, name of proprietor unknown . . skeleton found in—"

"No!" gasped Henderson aloud.

He read, reread *that* closely. The skeleton had been found in a box of earth in the cellar beneath the shop. The box was a coffin. There had been two other boxes, empty. The skeleton had

been wrapped in a cloak, undamaged by the flames—

And in the hastily penned box at the bottom of the column were eyewitness comments, written up under scareheads of heavy black type. Neighbors had feared the place. Hungarian neighborhood, hints of vampirism, of strangers who entered the shop. One man spoke of a cult believed to have held meetings in the place. Superstition about things sold there—love philters, outlandish charms and weird disguises.

Weird disguises—vampires—cloaks—*his eyes!*

"This is an authentic cloak."

"I will not be using this much longer. Keep it."

Memories of these words screamed through Henderson's brain. He plunged out of the room and rushed to the panel mirror.

A moment, then he flung one arm before his face to shield his eyes from the image that was not there—the missing reflection. *Vampires have no reflections.*

No wonder he looked strange. No wonder arms and necks invited him. He had wanted Lindstrom. Good God!

The cloak had done that, the dark cloak with the stains. The stains of earth, grave-earth. The wearing of the cloak, the cold cloak, had given him the feelings of a true vampire. It was a garment accursed, a thing that had lain on the body of one undead. The rusty stain along one sleeve was blood.

Blood. It would be nice to see blood. To taste its warmth, its red life, flowing.

No. That was insane. He was drunk, crazy.

"Ah. My pale friend the vampire."

It was Sheila again. And above all horror rose the beating of Henderson's heart. As he looked at her shining eyes, her warm mouth shaped in red invitation, Henderson felt a wave of warmth. He looked at her white throat rising above her dark, shimmering cloak, and another kind of warmth rose. Love, desire, and a—hunger.

SHE must have seen it in his eyes, but she did not flinch. Instead, her own gaze burned in return.

Sheila loved him, too!

With an impulsive gesture, Henderson ripped the cloak from about his throat. The icy weight lifted. He was free. Somehow, he hadn't wanted to take the cloak off, but he had to. It was a cursed thing, and in another minute he might have taken the girl in his arms, taken her for a kiss and remained to—

But he dared not think of that.

"Tired of masquerading?" she asked. With a similar gesture she, too, removed her cloak and stood revealed in the glory of her angel robe. Her blond, statuesque perfection forced a gasp to Henderson's throat.

"Angel," he whispered.

"Devil," she mocked.

And suddenly they were embracing. Henderson had taken her cloak in his arm with his own. They stood with lips seeking rapture until Lindstrom and a group moved noisily into the anteroom.

At the sight of Henderson the fat host recoiled.

"You—" he whispered. "You are—"

"Just leaving," Henderson smiled. Grasping the girl's arm, he drew her toward the empty elevator. The door shut on Lindstrom's pale, fear-filled face.

"Were we leaving?" Sheila whispered, snuggling against his shoulder.

"We were. But not for earth. We do not go down into my realm, but up—into yours."

"The roof garden?"

"Exactly, my angelic one. I want to talk to you against the background of your own heavens, kiss you amidst the clouds, and—"

Her lips found his as the car rose.

"Angel and devil. What a match!"

"I thought so, too," the girl confessed. "Will our children have halos or horns?"

"Both, I'm sure."

They stepped out onto the deserted rooftop. And once again it was Halloween.

Henderson felt it. Downstairs it was Lindstrom and his society friends, in a drunken costume party. Here it was night, silence, gloom. No light, no music, no drinking, no chatter which made one party identical with another; one night like all the rest. This night was individual here.

The sky was not blue, but black. Clouds hung like the gray beards of hovering giants peering at the round orange globe of the moon. A cold wind blew from the sea, and filled the air with tiny murmurings from afar.

This was the sky that witches flew through to their Sabbath. This was the moon of wizardry, the sable silence of black prayers and whispered invocations. The clouds hid monstrous Presences shambling in summons from afar. It was Halloween.

It was also quite cold.

"Give me my cloak," Sheila whispered. Automatically, Henderson extended the garment, and the girl's body swirled under the dark splendor of the cloth. Her eyes burned up at Henderson with a call he could not resist. He kissed her, trembling.

"You're cold," the girl said. "Put on your cloak."

Yes, Henderson, he thought to himself. Put on your cloak while you stare at her throat. Then, the next time you kiss her you will want her throat and she will give it in love and you will take it in—hunger.

"Put it on, darling—I insist," the girl whispered. Her eyes were impatient, burning with an eagerness to match his own.

Henderson trembled.

PUT ON the cloak of darkness? The cloak of the grave, the cloak of death, the cloak of the vampire? The evil cloak, filled with a cold life of its own that transformed his face, transformed his mind, made his soul instinct with awful hunger?

"Here."

The girl's slim arms were about him, pushing the cloak onto his shoulders. Her fingers brushed his neck, caressingly, as she linked the cloak about his throat.

Henderson shivered.

Then he felt it—through him—that icy coldness turning to a more dreadful heat. He felt himself expand, felt the sneer cross his face. This was Power!

And the girl before him, her eyes taunting, inviting. He saw her ivory neck, her warm slim neck, waiting. It was waiting for him, for his lips.

For his teeth.

No—it couldn't be. He loved her. His love must conquer this madness. Yes, wear the cloak, defy its power, and take her in his arms as a man, not as a fiend. He must. It was the test.

"Sheila." Funny, how his voice deepened.

"Yes, dear."

"Sheila, I must tell you this."

Her eyes—so alluring. It would be easy!

"Sheila, please. You read the paper tonight."

"Yes."

"I . . . I got my cloak there. I can't explain it. You saw how I took Lindstrom. I wanted to go through with it. Do you understand me? I meant to . . . to bite him. Wearing this damnable thing makes me feel like one of those creatures."

Why didn't her stare change? Why didn't she recoil in horror? Such trusting innocence! Didn't she understand? Why didn't she run? Any moment now he might lose control, seize her.

"I love you, Sheila. Believe that. I love you."

"I know." Her eyes gleamed in the moonlight.

"I want to test it. I want to kiss you, wearing this cloak. I want to feel that my love is stronger than this—thing. If I weaken, promise me you'll break away and run, quickly. But don't misunderstand. I must face this feeling and fight it; I want my love for you to be that pure, that secure. Are you afraid?"

"No." Still she stared at him, just as he stared at her throat. If she knew what was in his mind!

"You don't think I'm crazy? I went to this costumer's—he was a horrible little old man—and he gave me the cloak. Actually told me it was a real vampire's. I thought he was joking, but tonight I didn't see myself in the mirror, and I wanted Lindstrom's neck, and I want you. But I must test it."

"You're not crazy. I know. I'm not afraid."

"Then—"

The girl's face mocked. Henderson summoned his strength. He bent forward, his impulses battling. For a moment he stood there under the ghastly orange moon, and his face was twisted in struggle.

And the girl lured.

Her odd, incredibly red lips parted in a silvery, chuckly laugh as her white arms rose from the black cloak she wore to circle his neck gently. "I know—I knew when I looked in the mirror. I knew you had a cloak like mine—got yours where I got mine—"

Queerly, her lips seemed to elude his as he stood frozen for an instant of shock. Then he felt the icy hardness of her sharp little teeth on his throat, a strangely soothing sting, and an engulfing blackness rising over him.

Disbelief

Around 1800, there was a considerable fall of meteorites in France, and the mayor and other officials of the little town near which the fall occurred sent to the French Academy of Sciences a witnessed, sworn statement of the actuality of the fall. At that date, science had not accepted the fact of the fall of meteorites from the heavens, as there was no theory which would make such an occurrence reasonable. The French Academy ignored the statement officially, and unofficially referred to it as an outstanding example of mass credulity.

Shortly thereafter, the curator of the Museum of Natural History of Vienna officially warned museum societies against the display of so-called aërolites, because the display of these mythical things, of the same order of credibility as a piece of unicorn horn would be, would detract from the value of the rest of the collection. It was not until 1829 that a book appeared—printed in Vienna, incidentally—containing such an abundance of evidence as to convince skeptics of the existence of meteorites, and leading to an explanation of the puzzle. Meteorites became pieces of the jig-saw puzzle pattern of science when it was realized they were tiny planetoids, revolving about the Sun in vast numbers in eccentric orbits which Earth's movements intersected.

THE PIPING DEATH

By ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

THE PIPING DEATH

Snakes dance to the whine of pipes—and the control of a wizened little madman!

By Robert Moore Williams

ALL afternoon they were restless. Twice Pop Ingram, vaguely uneasy, carried news of this restlessness to his young boss, Jim Faulk. The first time he was too busy to be bothered. Ingram returned an hour later.

The old man had something on his mind that he wasn't telling. "Jim"—Pop avoided his eyes, stared instead at the glass case containing the skull of the Gaboon viper, the inch-long curved fangs drained of all deadliness now—"they're upset about something. I never saw them like this before. Maybe"—the old man twisted his hands—"maybe we ought to clear the house, lock the doors."

Jim Faulk stared at the old attendant, saw that Pop was worried. There was one sure sign. He wasn't eating apples. All day long he nibbled at the fruit. But he wasn't nibbling now.

"This is Saturday. We can't very well lock the doors."

Ingram was stubborn. "Seems to me it would be a good idea. They're so restless. I'm scared one might get loose—"

"Nonsense. The only way out of those cages is through the small feeding door at the back. They can't get loose."

He thought of what would happen if one of them did get loose. He rose from his chair. "I'll go take a look."

He knew Pop Ingram watched him walk from the basement, where his tiny office was located, to the stairs. He knew Pop wanted to go with him. But he did not know why the old man did not come along.

The usual Saturday-afternoon crowd sidled along the railing, which kept them from the glass fronts of the cages. Here, in this building, the crowd was always silent. Somehow, when they entered here, they dropped their normal voices to a whisper. Even the kids, staring at the creatures behind those glass fronts, were awed.

They *were* restless. The sluggish python, which had taken no interest in life since he arrived and had to be force-fed, was alert, twisting his fourteen-foot body in a sinuous ripple of mottled coils, questing with his blunt nose at the glass, seeking an opening that was not there.

Jim Faulk looked. It was the first time he had ever seen the python so active.

Among the dry palmetto branches, the golden-brown bushmaster was coiling and uncoiling, his triangular head always facing the glass that kept him from sating his deadliness on the silent creatures that moved in an unending stream before him.

The green mambas, vicious and deadly, were alert in their tree, their bodies projecting out and down two feet beyond the limbs that supported them. Thus they waited along the jungle trails, their green bodies resembling the limbs on which they hung.

The King was coiled, his head in striking position, his eleven-foot body a slate-gray mass. He was not restless. The

venom in his fangs would kill a horse, would be almost instantly deadly to a man. He was the King cobra. He seemed to be waiting.

The Gaboon viper, the mate of the one whose skull rested in the glass case in the basement below, was alert, poised and ready, his heavy four-foot body the color of the dirty sand in which he loved to bury himself. There was no known antidote for the venom of this viper. If he got you, it was all over.

They were his responsibility. True, he was only thirty, but he had come to the zoo asking for a job when he was twenty. Getting the job, he had found a few snakes poorly displayed. Within ten years his steady work had resulted in this large snake house.

They were his babies, and they were restless in a way he had never seen them. The rattlers, the copperheads, and the moccasins—even the harmless coach snakes—were imbued with this strange restlessness.

He consulted the barometer on the wall. The pressure was 28.50—normal. The humidity was normal. The temperature was right. What? He shook his head. No, they weren't hungry. They were properly fed. Every condition of their life was as normal as scientific skill could make them. Then why this strange restlessness?

HE WALKED again around the room, pushed by the pressure of the shifting throng. How these curious men and women, these awed kids, would scream and flee if the King got out of his cage! All of them would not be able to flee fast enough. The King, like the rest of his vicious tribe, would attack anything that moved. That came of being King.

The spitting cobra, in a sudden jerky movement as he stopped in front of its cage, sprayed poison on the glass. Instinctively, he jumped back, his hands going to his eyes, the point at which the venom had been aimed. He felt a little sick.

For many years the Western scientists had thought the stories of the spitting cobra—a snake that ejected its venom by spitting—were fictions of the Eastern imagination. They knew better now.

Jim Faulk rubbed his eyes. Yes, they knew all about spitting cobras, they knew all about serpents, or thought they did. They could explain the snake charmer playing on his pipes of reed while the cobras danced in front of him. It was simple—the snakes were without fangs. But there were instances, authenticated by reputable observers, of the dancing snakes having their fangs, and here the explanations always stumbled.

Jim Faulk moved along in front of the cages, warily watching the restlessness of his charges. He wondered what went on under those shallow brain cases, behind those beaded eyes. Did any thoughts move there, other than the sharp impulses of hunger and fear? Did something else look out of the eyes of the serpent? From ancient days man had thought so. He had seen the dark wisdom of the ages glittering in the eyes of the snake. He had feared the serpent exceedingly, had ancient man. In innumerable disguises, he had set it up as the symbol of immortality. But that was superstition.

He went back to his basement office. Pop Ingram was waiting for him. As the old man looked at him, momentarily Jim fancied his eyes had something of the beady intentness of the snake's.

"Did you see them, Jim?"

Faulk nodded. "Everything is normal, so far as I can tell, but I never saw them so restless before. Do you have any ideas as to the cause?"

Pop looked away, and Faulk suddenly realized how little he knew about this man who had come to him five years previously asking for a job.

"No. Snakes are queer. Maybe we

had better close the door?"

Faulk was stubborn. He didn't scare at shadows. "No, if we shooed everybody out and closed up, the rumor would be sure to get around that a snake had escaped. People would be afraid to play in the park, to use it for picnics, if they thought a cobra was loose. No. There is no danger. There can't be—"

The old man had something on his mind that he wouldn't talk about. Faulk, sensing this, suddenly blazed.

"If you know something and are not telling me, I'll break your neck!"

Pop was instantly apologetic. "No, Jim, no. I don't know anything. I'm just scared, that's all. I'm mortally afraid of snakes, and when I see them restless like they are, it upsets me. I get to thinking what would happen if one of those scaly devils got a chance to nail you with his fangs—"

"If you're so afraid of them, why did you come here looking for a job?"

"Well, jobs were hard to find, and I had to take what I could get." The answer was weak, unconvincing. Jim let it pass. If Pop Ingram didn't want to tell, he wouldn't tell.

"Close the doors at five—the usual time," he ordered.

INGRAM said nothing more. He turned, went out of the room. Jim Faulk watched him go. He was trying to understand how a man who hated and feared snakes as Ingram did would choose to work around them.

Conscious of a vague apprehension, he lingered in his office during the two hours until he knew Pop had closed the doors. Vaguely, he knew he was waiting, yet certainly he did not know what he was waiting for.

He must have heard the sound for several minutes before he realized it. It seemed so far away, so dim and distant, as if it came from another world. Now heard, and now unheard, down into the basement of the snake house there filtered a thin, weird piping that sounded something like the music of tiny bagpipes heard from afar. It wavered and faded away, then came on again, came in a malignant flood of shrill whimperings, and as it penetrated to his conscious mind, Jim Faulk went tense.

His chair rolled from under him as he leaped to his feet. He stood for a second, tense in mind and muscle, and in that second the basement seemed to flood with a wave of eerie coldness. Then he was running toward the stairs.

The room upstairs was a huge rectangle. In the center a mass of foliage sprouted from a pond depressed below the floor level. The piping, louder now, came from behind the foliage, but his eyes went first to the glass front on his left.

The feeding door at the back was open. The King was gone from his cage. Gone. The King was gone. The King was free.

In the frozen depths of fear there was no room to wonder how it had happened. All he could think was that somewhere in the roomy expanse of the snake house eleven feet of sudden death writhed over the floor, or—and the fear took added depth—outside where the August dusk was coming down over the park, where tomorrow the picnickers would come, where the kids would shout in play.

His eyes went to the next cage, and the spitting cobra was gone, and beyond that, the tree of the mambas was bare, a six-inch black square marking the open feeding door at the rear. That door opened into a passageway behind the cages, but inside the confines of the building. A large door marked "Attendants Only—No Admittance" opened from the passageway at the rear of the cages into the main room.

Pop Ingram lay in that doorway, an uneaten apple still clasped in one hand.

He dropped on his knees beside the old man. "Pop! Pop—" He bent over the silent figure. "Pop! Old

man—" There was no answer.

The King, Jim Faulk thought. Only the King could kill like that.

What had happened? The thought beat in pounding waves in his mind. Had Ingram released the snakes? Why? Had the old man gone crazy? Had the strain of feeding and caring for the reptiles he feared and hated finally snapped something in his mind?

Behind him, and behind the foliage in the center of the room, the weird piping rose again, a thin ululation. But he was not listening to the piping. He was looking through the open door where Ingram lay, looking into the dark passageway behind the cages.

A wavering, silent body had twisted around the corner, a heavy body with a large triangular head. The head lifted up, and a forked tongue reached out toward him.

Slowly, with infinite care never to make a hasty move, he forced himself to rise to his feet. He inched away from the door, leaned with his back to the rail, which he held in both hands to keep himself from trembling.

The body was short and fat and dirty gray, the color of dark sand. It moved slowly past the motionless body of Ingram, and the Gaboon viper, for whose poison there is no antidote, slid purposefully across the floor, went out of sight as it moved around the mass of foliage.

FAULK sucked great gulps of air. There was no strength in his legs. There was sweat all over his body.

His one thought was to get back to the basement, where the phone would send a call for help. The doors on both sides were closed. There was a chance, then, that as yet no snakes had escaped from the building.

He did not heed the piping. Whatever was going on behind the green mass would have to wait for men with guns and nets and forked sticks and heavy sacks, but more than anything else—with guns. No man would have the temerity to enter that house with the King at large.

Faulk started to edge along the railing.

He saw Pop Ingram move. Pop, who was dead, moved.

As Faulk stared, the old man rolled over, weakly pushed himself to a sitting position. One hand went to the back of his head.

"Pop! Pop—"

Faulk, with the memory of that heavy body that had slid by Ingram only moments before and with the thought that there might be others following, slipped forward. "Damn you, Pop—" He choked off his curses, for loosing the snakes was not the act of a sane man, and cursing an insane man was pointless. "Which one got you, Pop? Quick, man, so I can give you a shot of antivenom!" He shook Ingram roughly.

Ingram's eyes went from him to the cages, and wild fear became a stark naked horror in them. "They're loose—" he whispered.

Faulk was tough. "I ought to let you die, for turning them loose. You will die, and mighty soon if you don't tell me which one got you."

Ingram came to his feet. He held to the railing. His face mirrored futile refutation. "Jim! You think I—No! I haven't been bit. I was slugged. He slipped into the passageway while I was running the customers out, and when I came back from locking the doors to make a final check of the cages, he slugged me from behind. He . . . he turned them loose—" Ingram's hand went to the back of his head, and Faulk saw the fingers come away bloody. But his mind was not on the bloody fingers, nor on the fact that he had misjudged Pop. He had lost a lot of his toughness.

"He?" The words were an open-mouthed whisper. "He—"

Ingram started to answer. He heard it. His white face dulled to an ashen gray. His nostrils twitched. The pu-

pils of his eyes went wide.

"Listen." Ingram's lips formed the words but no sound came.

The hushed piping that had been lurking in the background rose in a sullen flood of malignant notes. In it was a tragic wailing, old as the race is old, a whimpering ululation that probed deep gulfs of time-worn fear in Faulk. That piping had been heard in the land of the pyramids; it whispered of dark deeds done on the bank of the ancient Nile, of darker yearnings old when the valley of the Tigris-Euphrates was green with the fertility of the dawn. Something of Ind was there, the first habitation of mysticism, the last home of mystery It rose in a pleading incantation, and prayed to some dark and noisome god of the old days when the earth was young and magic was a potent word describing what was not understood.

Behind that clump of greenery in the center of the room—

Faulk felt a depth of utter cold flash over his body. What was going on there? He wanted to know, but more than anything else, he wanted help.

"Let's let's get out of here. Back to my office. We can put in a call for the park police."

Ingram faced him in desperate earnestness. "No, Jim. That way, it will be sure to get in the papers. The public will blame you, saying you let the snakes escape. You will be removed from your position. No. You have worked too hard building up this collection to lose out now—"

"To hell with that. I can get another job." He wondered if he could.

The old man drew on some hidden fount of courage. "No. Besides, cleaning up this mess is not your job—it's mine."

"This is an order," said Faulk grimly. "I'm in charge here."

Ingram pleaded with him. "Get yourself under control, Jim because because it's an order that is not going to be obeyed. I know what is happening and maybe I know something to do about it. You don't—"

"You know?"

Ingram shook his head. In other circumstances Faulk would have shaken a meaning out of him. Instead, he rubbed the sweat from his face, and let Ingram have his way, whatever that way might be.

He saw the hard lines around the old man's mouth, and he knew that Ingram was forcing himself to walk around that mass of foliage. For that matter, Faulk had to force himself to walk beside him—had to steel his nerves against what he would see there.

THE DEVILISHLY cajoling music of the pipes was louder. He saw what was happening. The sweat seemed to freeze on his body. He was sick. He wanted to run, to hide his head, anything to get that sight out of his eyes. Beside him, he heard Pop Ingram muttering in a way that sounded like a prayer.

He was a little man—the piper. He squatted on his heels and his fingers moved over a small, three-mouthed instrument. He was a ragged little man. His clothes looked as if they had come from some junk pile, but Faulk did not pay any attention to that. His hair was gray and thin and stubby, but Faulk didn't notice that, not when he saw his face. It was a thin face, sloping abruptly back from the jaw. Over it the nimbus of an expression hung, so that somehow Faulk thought he saw the face of the ancient snake god of Ind through drifting clouds of incense. The face, and the black eyes in the face, dreamed, and to the little man, the dream was good, because it was incredibly evil.

But Faulk forgot the evil he saw on the face, ancient and unappeasable, when he saw the eleven-foot body of the King coiled on the floor in front of the piper.

The deadly head was up, hood distended, swaying and dancing to the compelling music of the pipes.

There was a green rope coiled around the neck of the piper—two green ropes—and the head of a vicious mamba waved in the air over each shoulder. On the floor beside him the heavy body of the Gaboon viper writhed in slow, sinuous undulation in rhythm with the music from the pipes. There were others, rattlers and moccasins, the golden brown of the bushmaster, caught in the net that the piper cast.

Killers, dancing to the music of their master.

All afternoon they had been restless, and twice Ingram, seemingly vaguely uneasy, had brought news of this restlessness to him. Pop—Pop Ingram, that doddering old man, how had he known?

Jim Faulk held his breath, in desperate fear lest some sudden movement would break that hideous spell and send the killers seeking their prey. For these snakes had their fangs, and they had, also, the venom that flowed down those hollow teeth. There was no fakery here. This was something beyond fakery—some weird control—of which science had heard only hints.

From what dark hole had that piper crawled? Jim did not know, did not much care. It did not matter. He was here.

Involuntarily, Faulk shuddered as over the wailing dirge he heard a voice speaking, the voice of Pop Ingram, in a tone that was utterly commonplace.

"Hello, Jackson—"

He said the words as if he was casually greeting an acquaintance, and he used a name!

The piper's eyes flicked away from their dream, flicked up to the two men, in sudden startled wariness. But the piping went on, did not falter or hesitate in its flow.

At the sound of Ingram speaking, the King, catching the movement in the air, ducked. Then the music caught him

Why

DID HE DIE?

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again, and again he danced before his master.

But the piper did not answer. His eyes stared at the two men, cloudy, hate-filled eyes.

"You must take them back to their cages, Jackson," Pop spoke again—spoke reasonably and calmly. "The floor here is too cold for them. Their cages are kept warmer than this floor. They will catch cold, and die, if they aren't back in their cages soon—"

Faulk recognized that reasoning. You used it on insane men. But it did no good to know that the piper was not sane.

"Were you ever in a cage?" the piper spoke from one corner of his mouth, manipulating the pipes from the other corner.

"No," Pop answered, still in that reasonable tone of voice. "But it must be nice to be in a cage. Plenty to eat, and lots of time to sleep, and it's always nice and warm—"

The way Pop said it, it did sound good. Jim Faulk tried not to move a muscle, tried to keep still, and wondered if he dared make a dash for the basement. He thought he knew something about snakes. For ten years he had worked with them, but here was something he did not know.

"And no freedom, and nothing to kill—think of that! Nothing to kill, if you're in a cage—"

"No need to kill. Plenty of food without killing for it. And a nice warm place to sleep to sleep to sleep—"

HE DRONED the words as if he was a hypnotist. He didn't succeed in changing the subject. The piper wouldn't have it. He spoke again out of the corner of his mouth, and the words were shrill.

"It is the pleasure of the King to kill. That's why I came here; so my friends in the cages can have freedom—the freedom that you two keep from them; so they can learn what it means to kill; so they can taste the thrill of sinking their fangs in soft flesh—" The piper's voice was rising until it was a scream. "Kill! They shall learn what it means to kill. As they were in the old days, they shall be masters again. And all living things shall bow down to them—"

While he talked, he kept the music going, and when his voice ended in a scream, the music changed, the rhythm grew faster, the notes rose higher, madder, more compelling, and Jim Faulk knew that Pop had failed. He prepared to take his slender chance on a dash for the basement.

Ingram held him. "If you run, they'll get you sure. The King can move like a flash—"

With the changing of the music the King changed his dancing. He began to jerk erratically; he began to twist and untwist his coils. Always his head faced the piper, but always he jerked his head away, as if he were looking for the thing that he must kill. And the mambas were writhing and twisting.

The piper talked to his servants, and as he talked, he drooled—as if he wanted to do the thing he was telling them to do, but was prevented by physical limitations.

"You will strike them, you will strike them again and again, these two men who have kept you in cages. And their bodies will twitch and jerk and swell as your venom runs through their veins—you will know what it means to be alive again. You will kill—" His music was rising higher, the rhythm pounding faster, and the King and his cohorts were dancing faster.

Ingram spoke again. "You've got one more chance, Jackson, to take them back to their cages. If you don't—" He left the sentence unfinished.

Faulk knew it was a desperate bluff, knew it was bound to fail, and when it

did fail, he knew what would happen. His legs were trying to crawl away from the fangs he knew were coming. He could feel them in his legs now; he could feel the sudden burning of the poison.

"Your last chance—" Ingram repeated.

That doddering old fool was getting them both killed. Jim Faulk cast a glance around the foliage in the direction he would have to run. Two moccasins, late in answering the call of the pipes, were writhing along directly in the way he would have to go. Whatever Ingram did, there was no hope now.

The piping burst in a flood of screaming notes, and the piper, eyes blazing with the witchery of his own music, flung up an arm toward the two men.

"Kill!" he screeched. The King started to turn with the pointing of the arm, but before he could turn, Pop Ingram moved.

There was something snakelike in the way his hand flashed into his pocket. And it came out holding the uneaten apple. An apple, against the King and his tribe. If it had been a gun—but it wasn't a gun.

His arm moved in a flashing ripple, like a snake striking, as he threw the apple.

Not at the King, or if it was at the King, it missed. It struck the Gaboon viper on his blunt nose.

In the dim depths of that snake brain there was only the knowledge that he had been hurt, that he was in danger. He did not know what had hurt him. The flat head came up half blindly, the jaws opened, there was a flash of white fangs—

A flash of white fangs that buried themselves in the arm of the piper!

For the tiniest fraction of a second, the eyes of the piper popped open and something of surprised pain looked out of them. In that instant the sound of the pipes ceased, and as they died, the mambas, excited beyond understanding, sank their fangs in the neck of the piper, struck and struck again. And the King was a thudding thump as he struck.

Jim Faulk started to run, and saw the moccasins rearing in his path. Pop Ingram grabbed his arm with a grip of steel, and Pop's voice cracked like a whip.

"Don't move, Jim, if you value your life!"

Faulk froze again.

HE SAW something come to the piper, come so quickly that he could not realize what was happening, come as less than a dozen racing heartbeats pumped the combined venom to heart and brain. His body went rigid, as though cut from stone. His face flushed. He toppled forward. His pipes struck the floor with a tiny clatter, slid in front of the two men.

They struck at the twitching body, the vicious mambas, until they seemed to realize it was dead. Then they coiled quickly, heads lifted up, darting to the right and the left. The King coiled, his beady eyes flicking over the room, seeking movement.

The air was filled with the sound of rattlers, a dry buzzing, and there was the odor of musk.

Jim Faulk and Pop Ingram stood without moving. Everywhere Jim looked, never turning his head, there was a sinuous ripple, there were dozens of bodies on the floor, all ready to strike.

The piper was dead. But his servants were alive.

Minutes passed and Faulk felt the keen pain of cramped muscles. Then fifteen minutes. He would have to move. Twenty minutes. Slowly the coils relaxed, slowly the dark bodies started drifting around the room, aimlessly searching. Faulk dared to move his legs, to ease the torture there. But still he knew they were trapped, for to start from the room would instantly in-

vite an attack. They were not saved. Their death was only postponed.

He whispered to Pop.

"I don't know, Jim. Perhaps. If we can stand it till morning the other attendants will see us—"

"It will be dark in another hour. I can't stay here all night. I would go crazy, knowing those things are loose around my feet and not being able to see them."

Pop shook his head. He looked older, much older. His body was stooped, bent.

"There is only one thing—"

He didn't say what, and somehow, Jim did not ask him, not even when he saw the old man bend slowly to the floor. Faulk was beyond surprise. He could only watch, and know that here was something that went beyond the understanding—

Pop Ingram picked up the pipes dropped by the piper—

And again that weird melody flooded through the snake house.

In that moment, Jim Faulk knew how much he did not know about the old attendant, how much there was that needed an explanation. But his mind was dull and he only watched.

An ordinary man playing on those pipes would have been disregarded, or would have died. But Pop Ingram played on them, and was not disregarded.

And they came, the mambas, and the bushmaster, the heavy viper, the King. Slowly, an inch at a time, he led them across the room, around the foliage, into the dark passageway. And when they were all in one small room, he closed the door behind them.

Then he fainted. Jim Faulk let him lie. Jim went to the basement, tottering. He found the whiskey, and he gulped at it. When he had steadied his nerves he took the bottle back to Pop.

HOURS LATER, after the wagon had come and gone, taking with it the body of the piper, down in his basement office, huddled in his chair and facing Pop, Jim started asking questions.

Ingram took his time about answering. "I can't explain. Nobody can; nobody knows enough. I've read all that has been written on the subject, and I don't know. He was a snake man, which is only a word for it and doesn't describe anything. It seems that occasionally a man is born who has part of his brain somehow akin to the brain of a snake. Why that happens— Perhaps it is a sort of throwback to the time—millions of years ago—when all life was reptilian. It seems to happen more often in India, and more is known about it there. But it happens here, too, occasionally. Such a man can control reptiles with the pipe. The piper was a snake man—"

There were other questions. "I knew him. He spent most of his life in an asylum—the only safe place to keep him. Besides being a snake man, he was crazy. He must have escaped, and came right to the place where he would find snakes—"

Faulk took another drink of the whiskey. It was shaping up; he was beginning to understand. But most of all he noticed the evasiveness of Ingram's answers. He hated to ask that question, but he had to know.

"How did I control them with the pipes? How do I know so much about it?" Pop Ingram gulped whiskey, tried not to answer, but Faulk's eyes bored through him. He coughed. "I know, because I'm a snake man—at least in part—"

There was so much pain and misunderstanding and hurt on Pop Ingram's face that Jim wished he had not asked. He took a long breath. He looked away. The sound of Ingram's voice came to him from a vast distance. "I know he was a snake man—because he was my son. His full name was Jackson Ingram—"

WHATEVER

By MONA FARNSWORTH

WHATEVER

Was there magic—and was it Black or White—or coincidence, or—whatever!

By Mona Farnsworth

JIM KENYON took the first trolley car that came along, rode to the end of the line and then climbed out. That plan had seemed as good as any when he had thought of it. It seemed pretty good now—the open, quiet of the country, sweet air and healing peace. Through the trees he could see the small roofs of a clustered village. He picked up his suitcase and started toward it.

By and by he reached a small square house with a sign that said, in bright letters, "Echo Vale Post Office." Jim went up and flipped open the screen door. It was dark inside, till your eyes could forget the sunlight, so he saw no one till the round little voice said:

"You wish something, sir?" Then Jim saw the twin moons that were a pair of spectacles and the pursy mouth that kept apart the red apple cheeks. And he said:

"Thanks, just some information if you please. I'm . . er . . I'm looking for a quiet place to board. If you knew—" the coughing got him then and when he stopped the man was saying:

"The House of Mercy, that's the place for you, sir. The House of Mercy."

"No," said Jim Kenyon, "no." Not any House of Mercy. Wasn't he running away from a hospital now? Who wanted to die in a hospital? "No." He shuddered. But the little man pursed his button mouth.

"You've got it wrong," he said. "The House of Mercy ain't what it sounds to be. It ain't nothing but just an ordinary place—though it's bigger than some and a lot more fancy than most. But it was built about fifteen years ago by Father Peter. No, sir, he wasn't no priest nor nothing; he was just the father of everybody and so he got called that. And folks got to call his house the House of Mercy on account of how that's just what it was. But now Father Peter's dead and the Professor owns it—or maybe it's the Duchess. I dunno. Some folks say one, and some the other. Some folks say the Duchess took the house, and all the Professor has is the goats. I dunno. But anyhow, they still take in folks who want to come, and if you want a nice quiet place— It's that house you just see through the trees. You go up that long driveway and through the gardens to reach it."

"Thanks," said Jim. He went out and closed the screen door behind him. The sun flowed hot around him again, and he shivered a little as he always did with the delicious heat of it. He still had the feeling that if he could just lie in hot sunlight all the time this chewing pain in his chest would stop. Even though the doctors didn't think it would ever stop. Well—

JIM ROUNDED the post office and struck off toward the driveway that began, somewhat surprisingly, in the middle of a field. But he plowed through the tall grass to reach it, then followed its straight, uncompromising way to the house.

It was a lovely house. Jim felt himself warming toward it. It was big and square, painted a warm yellow, and it had large fat-bellied columns holding up the graciously broad veranda. There were great trees bending around it and, sure enough, there was a goat tethered in the middle of a small rose garden at the side steps.

"Hello, Nanny," said Jim. Then he went up and crossed the porch to the big front door. It was a wide door and it was open. But there was a screen door that was locked, and the screening caught the light so that the house itself seemed stuffed with welling shadow.

Jim rang the doorbell, and the sound of its ringing came to him dimly, muffled by walls and distance.

But nothing else happened. The sunlight beat down so steadily you could almost hear it, and if you had heard it, it would have been the only sound. Not a leaf rustled, not a blade of grass stirred. Till Jim, staring at the shadowed emptiness of the door, suddenly realized it was empty no longer. There were two great eyes and a thin little pointed face. And Jim, remembering his Dickens, said:

"Are you the Duchess?"

"Oh, my no!" the child laughed. "That would be . . . the Duchess! Will you come in?" She stood on tiptoe and unlatched the door. It swung open easily, but Jim helped her anyhow.

Then he stepped into the house.

Bigger than some, the postmaster had said, and more fancy than most. Well, the description fitted. The hall he stood in was a good thirty feet wide and fifty, perhaps sixty, feet long. A gallery circled above his head and at his right hand stairs moved broadly upward. There was a shadowed impression of Oriental rugs and gleaming floors, a tapestry, a bit of armor—and the child said:

"The Duchess says to please come upstairs. She says for you not to mind, the stairs won't be too much for you."

"The stairs—" said Jim. But he was halfway up before he wondered how she knew. And by that time the little girl had slipped under his elbow and opened the door.

It was a wide double door, and there was something about the flourish with which she opened it that made Jim think of King Arthur's Court.

"The Duchess!" said the small voice.

"Ah—" said another voice.

Jim said nothing. He was looking at her. She had risen and she was as tall as he was, slim and lovely and cool—the way the thought of peace is cool. Soothing and tranquil. She wasn't beautiful—or was she? With her dark hair parted in the middle and her quiet white face. And she said:

"Your room is ready. I am sorry the pain has been so severe. But it will be better here. It will be very much better." She looked at him gravely, and before he could speak she had moved past him and was part way down the balcony. Jim followed her. There seemed nothing else for him to do. And the child followed, too. He could hear her footsteps, little and tapping, on the bare polished floor—though he didn't turn to look at her. He didn't want to look at anything but the lovely flowing figure in front of him.

And then she had stopped and was opening, slowly, another double door.

"It is a pleasant room," she said.

"Pleasant—" said Jim, and stared. It was heaven, that room. Quiet and serene. Broad and low; cool with ivory furniture and warm with chintz flowers, with the dappled light of trees and shaded sunlight flowing into and over it.

"You are so tired," said the Duchess, "and the pain in your chest has worn you out. You need much rest." She moved to the bed, turned down the covers and the sheets which, somehow, looked like the smooth petals of cool flowers. "I'll bring you something to

eat," she said. And then Jim was alone.

But he didn't eat anything when she brought up the tray. By that time he was asleep, his body stretched gratefully and his breath coming light and even.

HE WOKE suddenly to darkness. And to the suffocating thunder of his own heart. He sat up. His heart. It had been doing this lately. Beating till his whole body shook. It was terrible. It was frightening. Jim Kenyon was frightened. But he pushed his terror down and moved his legs, cautiously, till they hung over the side of the bed. He had the feeling that if he moved too fast his heart would jump right out of him.

But he got out of bed safely and he found his suitcase. He found the little bottle in an inside pocket and he took two of the pills. Then he moved back into bed and sat there, straight and stiff, waiting for his heart to subside.

But it didn't subside. It kept on beating in that terrible, hard way. It shook his body. It shook the bed. It sounded as if it were hammering against the walls of the room. But, of course, that was his imagination. Jim's cold fingers crept toward his pulse. He still had the feeling that if he moved too quickly his heart would jump out of him. So he pushed his fingers cautiously till they touched his wrist. And astonishment jerked him.

It wasn't his heart at all. His heart was perfectly normal.

Jim sat still. And the hard thud continued. It was a heart. Somebody's heart somewhere. It had that distinct double thump of a heartbeat. It was unmistakable. Jim got out of bed. He stood in the middle of the room. He could locate the sound now that he knew it wasn't within his body. It came from one of the walls.

He lit the light and listened. But the sound went on. He could see the closet now, and he went toward it. It was locked but the key was still there. Jim turned it, the door swung open, and the sound of the beating heart struck him like a dull blow. Then it stopped. And as it stopped he saw it; small and red and shining a little, lying on the closet floor. Jim stooped and picked it up. It felt round and warm in his hand. And it moved a little, almost as if it were cuddling to his human touch. And behind him a voice said:

"The Professor has been killing a goat."

Jim turned. The Duchess was tall and gravely sweet. She held out her hand and took the heart from Jim's hand. She said again:

"The Professor has been killing a goat. He's very careless. The goat's hair is light. It blows so many places." She held up her hand for Jim to see. It was filled with a coarse little ball of goat's hair. The heart was gone.

"The Professor," said the Duchess again, "is so deplorably careless." She turned, went out, and he could see her walking slowly along the balcony still working the little ball of goat's hair in her lovely fingers.

But Jim found, when he got back to bed, that he'd taken a chill. And he lay for some time before he could manage to control the icy trembling that possessed him.

WHEN he woke in the morning the chill was gone, and the warm glory of the sunlight seemed to bake into his very bones. He got out of bed and stretched in it. Then he dressed and went downstairs. The odor of coffee tantalized his nostrils, and he followed it to the dining-room door. The sunlight was here, too, and it made a kind of halo around the Duchess' head.

She said: "Billy, you *must* eat your oatmeal."

"I don't want to eat it," said Billy. "I don't like oatmeal. And anyway Astalla isn't eating

"I've eaten mine," said Astalla.

"Well, I won't eat mine," said Billy.

"Billy," said the Duchess, "you must."

"Force," said another voice. "Such a foolish thing." Jim stepped into the room then and saw him. The Professor. His hair a venerable froth of silver, and his eyes blue lakes of gentleness. "Force," he said again, and he made it sound utterly absurd. Then his glance caught Jim's. "Don't you agree with me, young man?"

"It . . . it doesn't seem very constructive," said Jim.

"Very well," said the Duchess, "I'm completely vanquished. Run along, Billy. And don't play out of sight of the house. Now—" She pressed a bell; a house boy, scrubbed as to countenance, crisp as to linen coat, came in. His hair was a confusion of red spikes and his eyes seemed sluggish. The Duchess said:

"Mr. Kenyon will have orange juice, no cereal, a slice of curled ham and an herb omelet, Sam."

"Yes'm," said Sam.

"That," said Jim, "is my favorite breakfast."

"Yes," said the Duchess, gravely.

And the Professor said: "If you'll excuse me, please. My goats." And he left the room. The Duchess smiled for the first time. It brought tenderness into her eyes.

"The Professor loves those goats," she said gently. "They are his children." And then she said: "He is a very sweet man."

Jim ate his breakfast and then he slept in the sun. The day, after that, became a delicious round of eating to sleep, and sleeping to eat. The House of Mercy, he thought once drowsily, the House of Mercy.

And when the sun set he got up from the steamer chair on the side lawn and went into the house. The lamps were lit, and the amber light made the warm color of rugs and pictures flow into little pools. At the far end of the hall, doors were flung wide and beyond he could see a library, the lamplit table strewn with magazines, the walls rich with books.

And through the quiet a child yelled: "I won't eat it! I won't! I won't!"

"Billy," said the Duchess' voice.

Jim moved back toward the sound. A small table, dancing with nursery figures, was drawn to the open window. It was set with bowls of crackers and milk and Billy was pounding on it viciously.

"I won't!" he screamed. "I won't!"

"Billy, you—" The Duchess got no further. She ducked her head just in time. And the bowl Billy had hurled sailed past her head and crashed into the glass closet. There was a sickening shiver of glass, and a scattered heap of broken crystal and delicate bits of china grew on the rug.

Jim took one step. He moved his hands. That kid. What he needed was a spanking. Force. All right, maybe it wasn't constructive but by gosh there were times—

"Billy," said the Duchess, "go upstairs."

"I won't—"

"You will go upstairs."

"I won't! I won't! I won't!"

The Duchess picked him up. He kicked her once, but after that she held him so he couldn't. She carried him upstairs and when she came down she said:

"It requires time to learn how to deal with children of whose parentage one is ignorant."

"Parentage?" said Jim.

"We adopted them," said the Duchess. "Both of them. To find the best method of training them requires patient study and—experimentation."

THAT NIGHT Jim didn't sleep well. He was restless. It wasn't his heart. It was something else. Something worse

because he couldn't name it. It was there but you couldn't see it. It was a sound but you couldn't hear it.

And then, suddenly, he did hear it. He recognized it. A child crying. It was a long way off, muffled by walls and closed doors and distance. But no distance could veil the poignant heartbreak in that cry, and no closed doors could shut out the fright that came, finally, to edge it with little tongues of flame.

Jim couldn't stand it. No man could. That kid, somewhere, was scared to death. Jim sat up, swung his legs over the side of the bed and groped till he found his slippers. He slid his arms into his bathrobe and opened the door. The sound had stopped. The house was silent. Jim leaned out, straining his ears.

From somewhere a little goat bleated, calling its mother.

In the morning Jim went down through the house slowly. In the dining room Astalla looked up from her bowl of oatmeal.

"Billy's gone away for a lovely visit," she said happily. "Isn't that nice?" And then she added: "He's gone to visit our aunt Nancy."

"Very nice," said Jim. Something made him feel a little faint. He glanced out the window. The Professor was moving in long loose strides from the kitchen door to the stables. In his arms was cuddled a tiny baby goat.

"Isn't it a darling?" said Astalla. "I've been out to see it already. It was born during the night."

"No!" said Jim. "No!"

"Oh, but it was," said Astalla.

"You must learn not to contradict people, Astalla," said the Duchess.

"But the little baby goat was born during the night," said Astalla.

And the Duchess said: "It is possible Mr. Kenyon was speaking of something else." Jim turned. Her eyes met his, calm, quiet eyes filled with such infinite peace.

"I . . I'm going out to lie in the sun." Jim felt weak. He swayed a little as he went to the door. Then he felt the Duchess beside him, her arm cupping his arm so that all the tired weight seemed to be lightened. He felt her strength. He felt her sure serenity.

Jim opened his eyes drowsily. And the little new-baby goat nuzzled a wet nose into his hand. And suddenly a shiver walked up Jim's spine. It chilled his hands and froze something in his throat.

That night he knew he wouldn't sleep. So he did. He lay down and instantly he could feel it coming—that wonderful sense of drifting, of disembodiment, of warm light flowing, that comes when you are really going sound asleep. Jim sighed. His shoulders relaxed; his spine sank deeper; he knew the deliciously restful sensation of falling into a bottomless, comfortably padded well.

WHEN he woke he was already halfway down the balcony, walking steadily toward the stairs. He gave no thought to the matter. It seemed a most natural place for him to be and a most necessary place for him to go. He reached the stair and went on down, placing one foot surely after the other. The hall below was pitch dark, but it didn't seem dark to him. He knew where each piece of furniture was, and when Astalla's doll carriage lay unexpectedly in his path he didn't stumble over it. He just walked carefully around it as it stood there invisibly in the darkness.

He reached the place he was going to without any loss of time, and when he got there he simply pushed open the door noiselessly and slipped inside.

The library was just as it had been on the evening before when he had seen it—a glow of dim light from shaded lamps and the dull, old beauty of book-lined walls. The room was empty.

Jim sat down. There were many chairs to choose from; deep leather chairs

and two long divans. But the seat Jim chose had a carved, rounded back and heavy carved arms—teakwood, perhaps, or ebony.

He sat there for some time—till suddenly he was on his feet staring at those carved arms. They were still moving, writhing and twisting, and the snakes they had turned into were rearing high in a final furious lunge at Jim's throat.

Jim shook with chill. The room seem to lurch around him. His head began to throb with a terrible, regular beating. And he couldn't take his eyes from the chair arms.

But after a moment he realized he was being very foolish. Nothing had happened. The chair arms, no matter how carefully he looked, were nothing but wooden chair arms after all.

But he must have given the whole incident a great deal of attention, because he had heard no one come in, yet, when he turned around, the room seemed filled with people. Though when he counted them there were only four. There was the Duchess carrying a silver bowl and quietly bending her lovely head above it; there was the Professor, his silver hair shining and the tears he was silently shedding shining, too, on his gentle cheeks; there was Martha, the cook, her dark face darker, swathed in the crumpled folds of her apron; and there was Sam, his red hair spikier than ever and his eyes wide and a little blank.

And then, of course, there were the goats. Two of them. A large nanny goat and the tiny new-born kid.

Jim saw them just a split second before he saw the knife, long and gleaming; and just before he began to hear again that soundless throbbing beat that he had heard inside his head when he first saw the snakes. It was terrible. It grew louder and louder; it shook the mist, the floor, the walls—till suddenly Jim knew it for what it was. A heart. And it was then he saw the dripping knife and the big nanny goat's body—and the expression on the Duchess' face as she bent above her silver bowl that had grown a shining red from the thing which was in it.

And then the little new-born kid was held aloft—

"No!" screamed Jim. "No! Good God— *No!*"

JIM awoke to morning sunshine. Through the door drifted the tantalizing scent of bacon and from the kitchen below Martha's voice was lifted in dulcet melody. The Duchess stood beside the bed; she was smiling and in her hands was a tray.

"You have not slept well," she said gently. "It is too bad. You will rest today in bed."

"Yes," said Jim. He was weak. He knew it. Weaker than he had ever been before. The pain in his chest was an agony of torment and his heart was a small thunder underneath his ribs. "Yes," he said weakly, but he couldn't let it go at that. He had to know.

"Billy," he said, "when is Billy coming back from visiting his aunt Nancy?"

"Billy is home now," she said. "He is downstairs eating his oatmeal."

"His—oatmeal?"

"Yes," she was smiling now; "he has decided that, after all, oatmeal is rather nice to eat."

"Oh," said Jim. He stared up at the Duchess. He could feel his emotions swimming behind his eyes in a running tide—his doubts, his fears, his suspicions, and now his shame.

The Duchess' eyes were deep on his. She laughed, a small delighted chuckle. She said: "You thought Billy's leaving us and the arrival of the little goat were perhaps connected?"

"I . . . I—" said Jim.

And the Duchess said: "The little goat died during the night."

Jim's breath got tight. "So it is really true—"

The Duchess shrugged her gracious shoulders. "True or dreams—who can say? There are times when the land of one's imagination is far more real than this world we believe, at other times, to be the world of reality. And"—her laughter came again—"changing a stubborn child into a goat for a day would be—don't you think?—such a deliciously refreshing punishment. Just a little goat—out in the hot sun and the sweet fresh air—perhaps nibbling a little grass—"

Jim wasn't aware when she left. He simply knew that he looked up and she wasn't there. But the breakfast tray was appetizingly present on his knees—and in the air her last words lingered, also appetizingly. "Just a little goat—out in the hot sun and the sweet fresh air—" Jim closed his eyes. Just a little goat—out in the hot sun. God, what wouldn't he give this minute to feel the hot sun baking down into this cruel pain in his chest; to feel it sucking the agony out of his aching bones.

HE LAY still. Nothing had happened. He hadn't moved. But the sun was there. He could feel it, deliciously hot, pouring melted gold into his hide. He wanted to move, to wallow in the glory of it. But he was too weak. He was also too weak to open his eyes. They were gummed shut, the lids too heavy to lift. All he could do was to lie still and let the dear sun pour down over him. And by and by he felt the grass, soft under him.

So he knew he was lying somewhere.

He woke to darkness. The day had come and gone and the night was going, too. He lay still for a minute—and then he remembered. A goat. Good God! He struggled to his feet. A mighty trembling seized him, and a mighty fear. A mist of whirling thoughts blew across his mind. There was a herd of goats down in the stables. There had been many guests come and go through the House of Mercy. Come and go. Where had they gone?

Goats.

Jim started for the door. He swayed; he reeled. The weakness poured through him. And he began to cough. But the terror held on. He opened the door.

The sound of his coughing echoed along the balcony and down the stairs. Somewhere a door opened, and the Duchess called:

"Get back to bed!" Her voice held excitement—a tone Jim had never heard it hold before. "You must! You will kill yourself—" The sound of her footsteps came then, running toward him. And Jim began to run, too. He ran down the stairs and out the door. He ran and ran.

He kept on running. The air grew crisply and beautifully cool. And suddenly he loved it. His lungs no longer had to struggle to pull it in. And his running was no effort. It was beautiful. It was more like flying. It—it *was* flying! There was no ground under his feet. He looked down and could see there was none. He was delightfully surprised. Why, this was wonderful. So exhilarating. Why hadn't he ever thought to do it before? He looked down below him again. And this time he noticed something else. He noticed his body lying there, strangely and weakly sprawled on the ground. He could see figures moving around it; the Professor moving a gentle hand to feel of that sprawled body's still heart. But one thing he couldn't see, though he strained his unusually clear sight in an effort to look.

He couldn't see, possibly, whether that body way down below there was covered decently with pajamas—or whether it was covered with hair. He couldn't see—

And then a little puff of frest cool air whisked him up straight into the rosy light of dawn.

DIVIDE AND RULE!

L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

DIVIDE AND RULE!

We forget the major miracles of little things—like flea-powder!

By L. Sprague de Camp

Part II.

Synopsis:

Mankind is split up into a myriad of tiny, quarreling feudal States. And over mankind rule the hoppers—a mysterious, kangaroolike people who wear leather helmets and command the secrets of a profound science. Mankind is educated as the hoppers think good, and is allowed only such technologies as the hoppers consider wise. For example, explosives and power-driven vehicles are strictly forbidden—to men. As a result, knights in chrome-nickel steel armor joust with duralumin lances, and besiege castles of reinforced concrete.

One of these knights is Sir Howard van Slyck, second son of the Duke of Poughkeepsie. On his breastplate is inlaid the Van Slyck trade-mark: a red maple leaf in a white circle, with the family motto, "Give 'em the works," in a circle around it. He is a product of his environment—strong, fearless—except where hoppers are concerned—arrogant, and ignorant. Returning to his home on the Hudson from a local war, he is shocked out of his complacency by learning that his brother Frank, whom he has greatly loved, has been executed by the hoppers for the crime of scientific research.

In the hope of clearing the woeful confusion in his excellent but hitherto practically unused mind, he sets out on a journey to learn what he can about the nature of Man and the universe. At Catskill he falls in with another wanderer, Lyman Haas of Wyoming, a place of which Sir Howard has heard only vaguely.

In Amsterdam, on the Mohawk, they hear that Warren Kelly, a local robber chieftain, has kidnaped a girl and is holding her prisoner. Sir Howard gains admittance to Kelly's castle under the name of "Sir William Scranton of Wilkes-Barre." Haas creates a diversion by shooting arrows bearing bags of burning sulphur into the castle. When Haas has lured the gangsters out and away from the castle, Sir Howard kills a sentry and rescues the girl in the best knight-errant tradition.

They wait for Haas at a rendezvous near the Sacandaga Reservoir. The girl, Sally Mitten, is almost as mysterious as the hoppers themselves; she seems to know vastly more than Sir Howard about the hoppers and the true history of mankind. She begs him not to let her fall into the hoppers' hands. Accordingly, when a hopper investigating Kelly's alleged death appears and announces that both human beings must be examined, and demands to see Sir Howard's travel permit, the knight whips out his sword and kills the creature.

While Sir Howard is still faint with terror at his own unheard-of act, Haas arrives. They sink the hopper and its power vehicle in a nearby lake, and slip through the cordon of hoppers searching for their missing fellow by swimming the reservoir at night. Haas ex-

plains that it was he who drowned Kelly by lassoing him and pulling him into Kenneatto Creek in full armor. Sally Mitten reveals that the reason for the hoppers' unwonted interest in a purely human quarrel is that they were backing Kelly's rise to power with the object of splitting the Barony of Schenectady, in accordance with their principle of "divide and rule." She offers the two adventurers sanctuary in the Adirondacks. After four days of plowing through the brush, she points out Little Moose Mountain ahead. "That," she announces, "is where we're going."

VII.

SALLY MITTEN said she was going to run ahead to warn her people. The next minute she was scrambling up the steep shoulder of the mountain, pulling herself up by branches and bushes. The two men continued their slow switchback ride. Haas said: "Danged if I don't think it'd be easier to cut right across country than to try to follow what they call a trail around here."

Sir Howard watched the girl's retreating figure. It dwindled to thumb-size. He saw no sign of human habitation. But a man came out of some poplars, and then another. Even at that distance the knight could make out embraces and back-slappings. He felt a slight twinge of something or other, together with a devouring curiosity as to what sort of "people" this mysterious girl might have.

When he and Haas finally reached the level space on which the three stood, she was still talking animatedly. She turned as they dismounted, and introduced them. "This," she said, "is Mr. Elsmith, our boss." They saw a man in his late forties, with thin yellow hair, and mild brown eyes behind glasses. He gripped their hands with both of his in a way that said more than words. "And this is Eli Cahoon." The other man was older, with white hair under the world's oldest felt hat. He was dressed in typical north-woods fashion, his pants held up by one gallus and rolled up at the bottoms to show mud-caked laced boots. "Lyman, you've been calling us York Staters Yankees; Eli's the genuine article. He comes from Maine."

Sir Howard had been looking through the poplars. He saw that what he had first thought to be a cave was actually a good-sized one-story house, almost buried under tons of soil blending into the mountainside, and artfully camouflaged with vegetation. You couldn't see it at all until you were right on top of it.

The man named Cahoon moved his long jaw, opened his thin mouth to show crooked, yellow snags, and spat a brown stream. "Nice wuck," he said, "gettin' our Sally outa that caastle." His forearms were thick and sinewy, and he moved like a cat.

"Wasn't nothing to it," drawled Haas. "I just called 'em names to make 'em mad, and How, here, walked in and tuck her while they was out chasing me."

SIR HOWARD was surprised to see that Elsmith was up and fully dressed already. The man smiled at him, showing a pair of squirrel teeth. Somehow he reminded the knight of a friendly rabbit.

"We keep early hours here," he said. "You'd better get up if you want any breakfast. Though how you can eat anything after the dinner you put away last night I don't just see."

Sir Howard stretched his huge muscles. It was wonderful to lie in a real bed for a change. "Oh, I can always eat. I go on the principle that I might be without food some day, so I'd better take what's offered. To tell the truth, we were all about ready to try a birch-bark salad with pond-scum dressing when we arrived. And we'd have been hungrier yet if Haas hadn't shot

a fawn on the way up."

During breakfast Sir Howard, who was not, these days, an unobservant young man, kept his eyes and ears open for clues to the nature of this ménage. Elsmith talked like a man of breeding, by which the knight meant a member of his own predatory feudal aristocracy. In some ways, that was. Sir Howard decided that he was probably a decayed nobleman who had offended the hoppers and was hiding out in consequence. Sally Mitten called him "Uncle Homer." On the other hand, Elsmith and the girl had something about them—a tendency to use unfamiliar words and to throw mental abstractions around—that set them apart from any people the knight had ever known. Cahoon—who pronounced his name in one syllable—was obviously not a gentleman. But on the rare occasions when he said anything at all, the statements in his tight-lipped Yankee accent showed a penetrating keenness that Sir Howard wouldn't have expected of a lower-class person.

After breakfast Sir Howard lounged around, his pipe going, speculating on his own future. He couldn't just sit and impose on these people's hospitality indefinitely, rescue or no rescue. He was sure they'd expect something of him, and wondered what it would be.

He was not left in doubt long.

"Come along, Van Slyck," said Elsmith. "We're putting in some potatoes today."

Sir Howard's jaw sagged, and his class prejudice came to the surface with a rush. "*Me* plant potatoes?" It was a cry more of astonishment than resentment.

"Why, yes. We do." Elsmith smiled slightly. "You're in another world now, you know. You'll find a lot of things to surprise you."

If the man had spoken harshly, the knight would have probably marched out and departed in dudgeon. As it was, his nchoate indignation evaporated. "I suppose you're right. There's a lot of things I don't know."

Bending humbly over his row in the potato patch, he asked Elsmith: "Do you raise all your own stuff?"

"Just about. We have some hens, and we raise a shoat each year. And Eli pots a deer now and then. There's a set of vegetable trays around the mountain a way; carefully hidden, of course. You'd never find them unless I showed you the place. It's surprising how many vegetables you can raise in a small space that way."

"Raising vegetables in trays? I never heard of that."

"Oh, yes, once upon a time tray agriculture was widely practiced by men. But the hoppers decided that it saved too much labor and abolished it. They don't want us to have too much spare time, you know. We might get ideas."

In Sir Howard's mind such statements were like lightning flashes seen through a window, briefly illuminating a vast country whose existence he had never suspected.

He asked: "Are you Sally's uncle?"

"No. She's really my secretary. Her father was my closest friend. He built this place. Eli worked for him, and stayed on with me when Mr. Mitten died six years ago."

IN THE afternoon Elsmith announced that that would be all the potatoes for today, and that he had correspondence to attend to. In the living room, Sir Howard noticed a stack of water-color landscapes against one of the plain timber walls. "Did you paint those?" he asked.

"Yes. They're smuggled down to New York, where an artist signs his own name to them and sells them as his."

"Sounds like a dirty trick."

"No; it's necessary. This artist is a good friend of mine. We don't need much cash here, but we've got to have some, and that's one way of getting it.

Eli traps for furs in the winter for the same reason.

"Look, I've got to dictate to Sally for a couple of hours; why don't you look over some of these books?" He pointed to the shelves that covered most of one wall. "Let's see . . I'd recommend this and this and these."

The books were mostly very old. Their yellow pages seemed to have been dipped in some sort of glassy lacquer. As a preservative, thought Sir Howard. He started reading reluctantly, more as a courtesy to his host than anything. Then sentence after startling sentence caught his attention—

He was startled when Elsmith, standing quietly in front of him, said: "How do you like them?"

"Good Lord, have I been reading for hours? I'm afraid I haven't gotten very far. I've never been much of a reader, and I had to keep looking things up in the dictionary.

"To be frank, I don't know what to think of them. If they're true, they upset all the ideas I ever had. You take this one by Wells, for instance. It tells a story of where men came from that's entirely different from what I learned in school. Men practicing science—governments I never heard of running whole continents—no mention of hoppers ruling over them—I just can't grasp it all."

"I expected that," said Elsmith. "You know, Van Slyck, there comes a time in most men's lives when they look around them and begin to suspect that many of the eternal truths they learned at their mothers' knees are neither eternal nor true.

"Then they do one of two things. Some resolve to keep an open mind, to observe and inquire and experiment, and to try to find out what *is* the nature of Man and the universe. But most of them feel uncomfortable. To get rid of the discomfort, they suppress their doubts and wrap themselves in the dogmas of their childhood. To avoid any repetition of the discomfort, they even suppress—violently—people who don't share the same set of beliefs.

"You, my boy, are faced with that choice now. Think it over."

AFTER DINNER Sir Howard said to Elsmith: "In one of those books I was looking over, it said something about how important it was to get all the information you could before making up your mind about something. And what I've seen and heard in the last week makes me think I haven't got much information about things, after all. For instance, just who or what are the hoppers?"

Elsmith settled himself comfortably and lit a cigar. "That's a long story. The hoppers appeared on earth about three hundred years ago. That was the year 1956, in the system of reckoning they used in those days. Nobody knows just where they came from, but it's fairly certain that they came from a planet outside the Solar System."

"The what?"

"The—I suppose you learned in school that the sun goes around the earth, didn't you? Well, it doesn't. The earth and the other visible planets go around the sun. I won't try to explain that to you now; some of these books do it better than I could. We'll just say that they came from another world, far away, in a great flying machine.

"At that time the state of mankind was about what it tells about in the last chapters of those history books.

"The hoppers landed in an almost uninhabited part of South America, where there was nobody to see them except a few savages who didn't matter. There couldn't have been more than a few hundred hoppers in the ship.

"But, you see, they're very different from any earthly animal, as you might expect. They do look rather like overgrown jumping rats, but the resem-

blances are mostly superficial. An active land animal that size has to have his skeleton inside like a mammal, instead of outside like an insect, and he needs eyes to see with, and a mouth to eat with, and so forth. But if you ever dissected a hopper—I have—you'd find that its internal organs were very different from those of a mammal. Even their hair is different; under the microscope you can see that each individual hair branches out like a little whisk broom. There are chemical differences, too; their blood is blue, because it has a blue chemical in it called hæmocyanin, like an insect, instead of the red chemical hæmoglobin, like a man or a bullfrog. So you couldn't possibly cross hoppers with any kind of earthly animal.

"It's thought among those like me who have studied the hoppers that the world they came from is much like ours in temperature, and that it has rather less oxygen in its atmosphere. It's also larger, and hence has a more powerful gravity, which is why the hoppers can make such enormous leaps so easily on earth. Being larger, it has an atmosphere deeper than ours and denser at the surface. That's why the hoppers' voices are so shrill; their vocal apparatus is designed to work in a denser medium.

"Most people know that they're bisexual and oviparous—they lay eggs about the size of robins' eggs. They grow very rapidly and almost reach their full size within a year of hatching. That's how they conquered the earth. In their ship were hundreds of thousands—perhaps millions—of eggs, together with knocked-down incubators which they set up as soon as they landed. As they were in a heavily forested area, and as they are vegetarians, they didn't have any food problem.

"Their science at the time was quite a way ahead of ours, though not so far ahead that we probably wouldn't have gotten to that stage in time in the natural course of events. It took an advanced science to transform the wood, water, and soil in their neighborhood into weapons of conquest on a colossal scale. But it was their unexpectedness and their enormous numbers that helped them as much as their science.

"THERE WAS also the fact that to the people of the time they looked funny rather than sinister; it took a little while to learn to take them seriously. But people stopped thinking they were funny when they conquered all of South America within a week of the time they were first reported, and nobody's made that mistake since. Africa followed in short order. Their flying machines were faster than ours, their explosives were more destructive, and their guns shot farther and more accurately. They also had a lot of special gadgets, like the convulsion ray, the protonic bomb and the lightning gun.

"As a matter of fact these gadgets aren't so mysterious as you might think. The convulsion-ray projector shoots a stream of heavy positrons, or Y-particles, which you'll read about in the books. They affect the human nervous system so as to greatly magnify every nervous motor-impulse. For instance, suppose you were thinking of picking up a cup of coffee to drink. The thought would cause a slight motor-impulse in the nerves of your arm and hand. If you really wanted to pick the cup up, your brain would have to send out a much stronger motor-impulse. Now suppose a convulsion ray were turned on you, and you merely thought about picking up the cup. Your muscles would react so violently that you'd dash the cup, coffee and all, into your face. So you can see why human beings' bodies became totally unmanageable when the ray was turned on them.

"Or take the protonic bomb. One of those bombs weighing a ton has a chunk of packed hydrogen ions in it the size of a marble; which really does the

damage. The rest of the weight is caused by the coils and other apparatus necessary to keep the electrostatic field reversed, so the ions don't fly apart under the influence of their mutual repulsion. The minute you break down the field control, those ions go away from there in a hurry. They have a defense against these bombs, too, just in case men might steal one some day; we call it the X beam. It's really just a huge Roentgen-ray projector, thousands of times more powerful than a medical X-ray apparatus. It de-reverses the field around the protons prematurely.

"But to get back to the story: Eurasia and North America, the most densely populated continents, held out for a while, and people began to think they might win. That was their mistake. The hoppers had merely paused in the attack while their second generation was reaching maturity. They can be fantastically prolific when they want to be, and as soon as the first crop had reached sexual maturity they'd laid another crop of millions of eggs. Remember, out of a given population of human beings only a fifth at most will be men of fighting age. But among the hoppers everyone, practically, except the casualties, was available for the attack.

"They had another advantage. They seem to be immune to all the known earthly bacteria, though they have a few minor diseases of their own. But the converse unfortunately isn't true. It's probable that they deliberately turned loose a lot of their own exotic bacteria, and one of these found the human body a congenial environment. It caused a plague known as the blue madness. It was quite horrible. At least half the human race died of it. So —anyway, the hoppers won."

Sir Howard asked, "Have there been any more blue plagues since?"

"No; apparently part of the human race is naturally immune, and everyone who wasn't, died. So all of us today are immune, being descended from the survivors.

"The hoppers didn't exterminate us while they had the chance, for which we might give them some credit. Apparently when they saw the fairly high state of human civilization, and its enormous productive capacity, they decided that it would be nicer to set themselves up as a ruling species and use the rest of us to plow the farms and run the machines, while they enjoyed their own hopperish amusements, one of which seems to be ordering us around. They may even have felt sorry for us, though that's difficult to imagine. Anyway, that's the system they've followed ever since." He looked at his watch and got up. "Early hours here, you know. You can sit up to read if you want to, but I'm turning in. Good night."

UP THE TRAIL from the camp was a grassy clearing, in the middle of which was a stump. On this stump sat Sally Mitten, smoking a cigarette and looking very much amused. Around the stump in a circle marched Sir Howard. He was looking not, as one might expect, at the girl, but at Lyman Haas. The Westerner was walking around the stump in the same direction in a still larger circle, with the expression of one who is putting up with a great deal for friendship's sake.

"Little slower, Lyman," said the knight.

Elsmith appeared. "What . . what on earth, or off of it, is this? Some new kind of dance?"

"No." Sir Howard stopped. "I was just checking up on that Cop Copernican hypothesis. You know, about that motion of the planets—why they seem to go backward in the sky at times."

"Retrograde motion?"

"That's it. Sally's the sun, I'm the earth, and Haas is Mars. I was look-

ing at him to see whether he seems to go backward against the farther trees. You . . uh . . don't mind my checking up, do you?"

"On the contrary, my boy. I want you to check up everything you get from me, or from the books, every chance you get. Does he show retrograde motion?"

"Yep; he backs up like a scared crawfish every time I pass him."

"What do you mean, backs up?" said Haas. "I been walking forward all the time."

"Certainly, but you're still going backward relative to me. I can't explain it very well; I'll have to show you the place in the book."

Elsmith said: "Do you read books much, Haas?"

"Sure, I like to read sometimes. Only I busted my reading glasses in New York, and I ain't been in one place long enough to get a new pair since. I was in a bar, and I had those glasses in my shirt pocket. And I got into an argument with a guy. He was saying it was a known fact that all Westerners are born with tails. Now, I'm a peaceable man, *but*—"

"That's all right, Lyman," said Sally Mitten soothingly. "*We* know you haven't a tail. Don't we, Howard?"

The upper, untanned part of Haas' face reddened a shade. "Uh . . ahem . . Now, what's that again about those there planets? I want to get this straight—"

VIII.

SIR HOWARD said: "Are you going to tell me some more about the hoppers this evening?"

Elsmith blew out his match. "I never lecture until I have a cigar going, and then it burns down to nothing while I'm talking and I don't get a chance to smoke it. Silly, isn't it?

"But to take up where we left off: The hoppers saw they'd have to remodel human society if they were going to keep human beings in check, especially as the human beings still greatly outnumbered them, and they apparently considered that ratio satisfactory from an economic point of view. They couldn't afford to let us become power-

ful again. Well, what sources of power did we have?

"We had powered vehicles; some ran on roads, some on railroad tracks, some in the air, and some on the water. So they abolished them, for us, that is. We had explosives, so they took them away. We had united governments over large populations; therefore, they broke us up into small units. Societies in which able people could rise to the top regardless of birth were a menace. They studied our history and decided that a feudal caste system would be the best check on that. Scientific research was, of course, outlawed, and all scientific practice except such engineering as was necessary to keep the productive machine going.

"They abolished every invention that they thought might conceivably menace them. Did you know, for instance, that at one time you could talk over wires to people in all parts of the country? And that the telegraph companies owned vast networks of wires for sending messages almost instantaneously? Now they're just messenger-boy agencies, and deliver letters by horse or bicycle.

"That wasn't all. An empirical, materialistic outlook might enable us to see through the preposterous mythology that they were planning to impose on our minds through the schools. So the books expressing such a philosophy were put away, and the people who held it were destroyed. In its place they gave us mysticism, other-worldliness, and romantic tripe. They used the radio, the movies, and the newspapers and books to do this, as these institutions continued to operate under their strict control. They'd have been foolish to destroy such excellent ready-made means of swaying the mass mind. Ever since then they've been filling us with 'upright ignorance and stalwart irrationality,' as Bell, one of the prehopper writers, put it. And I must say"—here he leaned back, closed his eyes, and took a big puff on his cigar—"that my species has come through it remarkably well. It's had a terrible effect on them, of course. But when I get most discouraged I can get some comfort out of the thought that they aren't nearly as crazy as they might be, considering what they've been through."

"But," said Sir Howard, "but I was taught that God—" He stopped, confused.

"Yes? Assuming for the sake of argument that there *is* a God, did He ever confide in you personally? Who taught you? Your schoolteachers, of course. And where did they get their information? Out of textbooks. And who wrote the books? The hoppers. Just assume I'm telling you the truth; what *would* you expect the hoppers to put in the books? The truth about how they conquered the earth and enslaved its inhabitants, to act as a constant irritant and incitation to revolt?"

Sir Howard was frowning at his toes. "A couple of months ago," he mused, "I'd have probably wanted to make you eat my sword for some of the things you've said, Mr. Elsmith. No offense intended."

"I know that," said Elsmith. "And, if you'd been the man you were a couple of months ago, I wouldn't have said them."

"But now—I don't know. Everything seems upside down. Why didn't the people revolt anyway?"

"THEY DID; almost constantly during the first century of hopper rule. But the revolts were put down and the rebels were killed. The hoppers are microscopically thorough. As you probably know, they have a drug called veramin that makes you answer questions truthfully. Men had such a drug once, but this is much better, except that alcohol in the system counteracts it. They'd give an injection to every inhabitant of a suspected city, for in-

stance, for the sake of catching one rebel. And there was just one penalty for rebellion—death, usually slow. So after a while there weren't any more rebellions. There have been practically none in the last century, so the hoppers have eased up their control of human beings somewhat."

"Well," growled the knight, "what can be done about it?"

Homer Elsmith had seen that look in young men's eyes before. "What would *you* do?" he asked gently.

"Fight!" Sir Howard had unthinkingly clenched his fist, and was making cut-and-thrust motions in the air.

"I see. You see yourself at the head of a charge of armored cavalry, spearing the hoppers like razorbacks and sweeping them from the face of the earth. No, I'm not making fun of you; that's a common reaction. But do you know what would happen? You've seen wheat stalks fall when a scythe passes through them? That's what you and your brave horsemen would do if the hoppers trained a rapid-fire gun on you. Or they might use the convulsion ray, and have the men and the horses rolling on the ground and writhing while they tied you up. The effect lasts for some minutes after the ray's been turned off, you know. Or they might use a cone transformer, setting up eddy currents in your plate and roasting you in your own lobster shells."

"Well, what then?" Sir Howard's big fist struck his knee.

"I don't know. Nobody knows, yet. I don't know, though I've spent a good part of my life working on the problem. But that doesn't mean we shall never know. Man has solved knottier ones than that.

"We have some advantages: our numbers, for one. Then, the fact that the hoppers are spread out thinly over the earth makes them vulnerable to concerted uprisings. They're not an army, now, but a civilian administration and a police force. Take those hoppers at Albany; there are only a couple of hundred there. They're relieved frequently, because they don't like being stuck out in the sticks. If we were hiding out from human beings, this would be one of the worst places. But for the hoppers it's fine, because there are only two patrolling around the whole Adirondack area, and they seldom leave the main roads. Then there's the fact that they are not, really, very intelligent."

"Not intelligent! Why, they—"

"I know. They know a lot more than we do, and have the sciences at their command, and so forth. But that's not intelligence. A bright hopper is about as intelligent as a stupid man."

"But but—"

"I know, I know. *But* they have three big advantages. First: they learn quickly, even if not intelligently. That's how the original conquering armies were trained to be competent soldiers so quickly. Second: they live long. I don't know what their average life span is, but I think it's around four hundred years. And third: the helmets."

"The helmets?"

"THOSE leather things they wear. In their history, the helmet was invented by their god, whose name I can't give you because I can't imitate a canary. We'll call him X. As nearly as I can make out, this X was actually a great genius, a kind of Archimedes and Leonardo da Vinci and Isaac Newton rolled into one. They were some of the most brilliant men of ancient times. X may have been a sterile mutant. You can look that up later. I think it's likely, because the same strain of genius never again appeared among the hoppers, who were living hardly better than a wild-animal existence at the time.

"Early in life X hit upon the technique of scientific investigation: observing and experimenting to find what made things go. He invented their alphabet,

which is a cross between a phonetic system and a musical score. He invented an incredible lot of other things, if we can believe the story. Instead of killing him, as human savages might have done, the hoppers made X their god, so he didn't have to work for a living any more. That was probably X's idea, too.

"Four hundred years is a long time, as I said. Toward the end of his life he invented the helmet. It's really an electrical apparatus, the effect of which is to give the hopper who wears it an enormous power of concentration. A man, for instance, can't keep his mind on one subject for more than a few seconds at a time. Try it sometime. First thing you know you'll be thinking about keeping your mind on whatever you're supposed to be keeping your mind on, instead of keeping your mind on the thing itself. I hope I make myself clear. But a hopper with a helmet can think about one thing for hours at a time. And even a chimpanzee could learn calculus if he could do that, I imagine.

"It may be that they're even stupider than stupid men, and that the helmets actually increase their reasoning powers. It's certain that without the helmets they're even more scatterbrained than chimpanzees, so that they're incapable of carrying out any complicated train of action. One reason I think they're so stupid is that their science seems to have remained just about static in the three centuries since the conquest. But it may be that having half a billion slaves of an inferior species to do their dirty work deprived them of ambition."

"Then," said Sir Howard, "I'd think the thing to do was to rush them all at once and snatch their helmets off."

"Yes? You forget the guns and things. If we could time an uprising as exactly as that, we could kill them with our bare hands. I tell you, wide conspiracies have been tried before. They haven't worked. For one thing, we have no sufficiently deadly, simple, and inconspicuous weapon. We're much worse off in that respect than we were at the time of the conquest. We've got to have something better than gunfire, at least. Take those Albany hoppers again. They have a supply of small arms in the Office Building. The nearest heavy artillery is stored in the Watervliet arsenal. The really deadly things, like the protonic bombs, are down at Fort Knox, in the old vaults where they used to store gold. If we could overwhelm even a large fraction of the hoppers, we could capture enough of their own weapons to redress the balance. But we'd need something to help us overwhelm that fraction first, and bows and bills wouldn't do it."

"WELL, how about getting them to take their helmets off of their own accord? Couldn't you send out some sort of radio ray or something?"

"That's been thought of: plans for blowing out the electrical circuits in the helmets; plans for heating up the wires to make them too hot for comfort; plans for interfering with their operation by static. Static doesn't seem to affect them, and we simply don't know of any form of ray or wave that would accomplish the other objects. Take the heating idea. It would require enormous power to heat up all those millions of helmets, and the amount that actually comes into your receiving set over the aërial is so slight you can't feel it. The biggest broadcasting station in existence doesn't send out as much power as the engine in one of the hoppers' two-wheel cycles develops. How are you going to erect a station to send out thousands of times as much power, without *their* knowledge?"

"Hm-m-m . it does seem hopeless. Maybe if you put on one of the helmets it would give you an idea."

"That's been tried, too. I tried it once. It worked fine for about three

minutes, and then I got the worst headache of my life; it lasted a week. The hoppers' brains are cruder than ours; they aren't damaged by such treatment. You can't do it to a man's brain, though, at least not with our present knowledge. Perhaps we shall be able to some day, when we've shaken off *them*."

They sat silent for a while, smoking. Sir Howard said: "If you don't mind my asking, where did you get all this information? And where did these books come from?"

"Oh, using my eyes and ears over many years. I might add that I'm an accomplished burglar. The books, together with much of the information about the hoppers, were partly stolen. The rest of them were picked up here and there, mostly by Thurlow Mitten before I joined him. The hoppers couldn't be expected to go into every corner of every attic and cellar of every old house in the country, you know, as thorough as they are."

Sir Howard said, "Some of your statements remind me of things my brother Frank used to say."

Elsmith raised one eyebrow. "Sally told me about him. That's I'm sorry." Something in his tone gave the knight the idea that Elsmith might know more than he cared to say about his brother. But he had too much to think about as it was to inquire any more just then.

IX.

"—WELL, he throws his knife at me, and it pins my big toe to the log so I can't get it out nohow. But I says, 'Mike Brady,' I said, 'I was goin' to beat the gearin' out of you, and I still be.' So I took after him with my peavy. He runs, and me after him. But you know you can't run faast with a twenty-foot log of hard maple nailed to your foot—musta weighed nigh onto six hundred pounds—and after the fust mile or two I seed he was gainin'. So I throwed my peavy, so the point goes into a tree on one side of his neck, and the cant dog goes into the bark on the other side, and there he was, helpless. So I took my knife and cut his guts out. 'Now,' I says, 'that'll be a lesson to you to sass Eli Cahoon.' He says, 'O. K., I guess I was kinda hasty. If you'll just put my guts back in I won't sass you no more.' So I put 'em back in, and we been fine friends ever since. I still got the scar on my toe."

"That a fact? I remember one time out in Wyoming, when me and a fella was shooting arrows. We was shooting at horseflies. Pretty soon a mosquita comes along. He says, 'Bet you can't hit that mosquita.' I says, 'What'll you bet?' He put up a hundred clinkers, and I shot the mosquita. Then another mosquita comes along. He says, 'That was too easy. Let's see you hit this mosquita in the eye.' 'Which eye?' I says, not stopping to think—"

The speakers were talking softly and casually in the firelight. Sir Howard looked up from his book. "Mr. Elsmith," he asked, "what does this fellow mean? 'Government of the people, by the people, for the people.' What people?"

"—and that's how I lost a thousand dollars, through getting the right and left eyes mixed up. But I remember when I won this watch on a bet. Fella named Larry Hernandez owned it, which is how it has the same initials as mine. We wanted to see which could ride his horse down the steepest slope—"

Elsmith spoke. Sir Howard wondered what there was about this mild little man that gave his dry, precise words such authority. "It means that all the adults vote to select those who rule over them for a limited time. When the time's up they have another election, and the people can throw out their first set of officials if they don't like them."

"All the adults? You mean even in-

cluding the commons? And the women? But that's a ridiculous idea! Lower-class persons—"

"Why ridiculous?"

Sir Howard frowned in concentration. "But they . they're ignorant. They wouldn't know what was good for them. Their natural lords—" He stopped in confusion again.

"Would you call me ignorant?" It was very quietly said.

"You? But you're not a—"

"My father worked in an iron foundry, and I started work as a Postal Telegraph messenger boy."

"But . . but . . but—"

"I admit that with a hereditary ruling class you get good men occasionally. But you also get some remarkably bad ones. Take Baron Schenectady, for example. Under this 'government of the people' idea, when you find that your ruler is a scoundrel or a lunatic, you can at least get rid of him without an armed insurrection."

Sir Howard sighed. "I'll never get all these new ideas straight in my head. Thinking about them is like watching your whole world—all your old ideas and convictions—go to pieces like a lump of sugar in a teacup. It's . sort of awful. I should have come up here ten years ago to get a good start."

"NO."

"Aw, come on, Sal; you like me pretty well, don't you?"

"That isn't it."

"Well, what *is* it?"

"It wouldn't be—expedient."

There it was; one of those damned dictionary words again. He felt a surge of anger. Remembering Warren Kelly, an outrageously stinging remark formed in his mind. But his natural decency choked it off before it got to his lips.

"Well, why?"

She was baiting her hook. The boat rocked ever so slightly under the lead-and-snow cumulus clouds that towered over Little Moose Mountain and small Sly Pond.

"It's . . . this way. Maybe you haven't noticed, but we work hard at our job. Our job is the Organization, and we think that's literally the most important job in the world. Between that and keeping ourselves fed, we haven't time or energy for—personal relationships."

"I'm afraid I'll never understand you, Sally." He didn't, either. She didn't act like a lower-class girl. He ought to know; base-born girls were push-overs for him. On the other hand, the upper-class girls he'd known would be horrified at the idea of baiting a hook with an active and belligerent crawfish, let alone skinning and cleaning a mess of bullheads. But there wasn't any question of her being anything but upper-class. He wouldn't have it that she was anything but upper-class. If necessary he'd stand the feudal system—for which he was feeling less reverence these days—on its head in order to put whatever class she belonged to on top.

"Another reason," she went on. "Uncle Homer tells me that you'll probably join us in a day or two. Officially, that is. I may say that I hope you do. But—this is important—you *mustn't* join us for personal reasons. And if you have any ideas of joining

for such reasons, you can give them up right now."

"But why? What's so awful about personal reasons?"

"Because if you changed your mind about the personal reasons, you might change your mind about the other things. You idiot, don't you see? What's one girl more or less, compared to the human race—everybody you've ever known and millions of others?" The reel sang for a second before she heard it. She caught up the rod in a smooth, practiced movement and in a few more seconds had another bullhead in the boat. Sir Howard had already stabbed his hand on one of the fin spikes of the ugly brutes. But her hand gripped the fish's body as surely as his held a sword hilt "Damn them!" she said. "They swallow the hooks, clear down to their stomachs. Some day we'll go out on Little Moose Lake and troll for bass.'

As they walked back to the camp with the fish, they passed Lyman Haas. He took one look at the gloom on Sir Howard's blunt features and grinned knowingly. Sir Howard thought afterward that he minded that grin more than anything.

SIR HOWARD asked: "Hasn't your organization any name? I mean, you just call them 'us' all the time."

"No," said Elsmith. "It's just the Organization. Names are handles, and we don't want to give *them* any more handles to take hold of us by than we can help. Now if you'll just roll up your sleeve, please." He held a hypodermic up to the light.

"Will that have any permanent effect on me?"

"No; it'll just make you feel slightly drunk and happy for a while. It's what the hoppers use in their third-degree work. It's much better than torture, because you can be sure that the prisoner is actually saying what he believes to be true."

"Do I have to take an oath of some kind?"

"You don't have to. We go on the theory that a man's statement of his intentions, provided he actually says what he thinks, is as good an indication of what he'll do as any oath. People sometimes change their ideas, but when they do they almost always find excuses for breaking their oaths."

"Tell me, was my brother Frank one of you?"

Elsmith hesitated, then said: "Yes. He didn't go by that name in the Organization, of course. We didn't have a chance to warn him. His immediate superior, who would normally have reported the state of affairs to me, had disappeared a couple of months previously. We knew what that meant, all right, but we hadn't succeeded in reestablishing communication with your brother."

"This is the center of the whole business?" Sir Howard's eyebrows went up a little incredulously. Nothing much seemed to happen around the camp; certainly nothing that would indicate that it was the headquarters of a world-wide conspiracy.

"Yes. I see what you're thinking. Perhaps you hadn't noticed the number of times recently that you were tactfully lured away from the camp? There were conferences going on."

The knight was slightly startled. He'd never thought of that. He began to appreciate the enormous pains to which these people went. You couldn't improvise something of this sort; it took years of careful and risky work.

"How do you feel?" asked Elsmith.

"A little dizzy."

"Very well, we'll begin. Do you, Howard van Slyck—"

"YOU came through the test with flying colors, my boy. I'm glad of that; I think you'll make a good worker. I may add that if you hadn't, you would

never have left here alive."

"What? Wh-why? How?"

Elsmith reached inside his shirt and brought out a hopper's gun. "This, by the way, is the gun carried by the hopper you killed. We have some others. You didn't notice Sally take it from the body and hide it in her clothes, did you? You wouldn't. Sally knows her business.

"The reason I'd have used it, if necessary, is that you knew too much. Ordinarily it's only the old and tested workers who are allowed up here. Sally would never have brought you and Haas —who joined up last Tuesday, incidentally—if it hadn't been an emergency. You had to have a place to hide out, and you had too much good stuff in you to be allowed to fall into *their* hands. So we took a chance on you. If we'd been mistaken—well, we couldn't risk setting the Organization back years."

Sir Howard looked at his toes. "Would that have been right? I mean, according to your ideas. If I hadn't wanted to stay."

"No, it wouldn't have been just. But it would have been necessary. I hope that some day we can afford to be just. It's treacherous business, this excusing injustice on grounds of necessity. People have justified or condoned the most atrocious crimes that way."

"TRY IT again, Van Slyck."

Sir Howard obediently turned and walked back across the room. He felt very silly indeed.

"No, that won't do. Too much swagger."

"You can hear him clank," said Sally Mitten, "even when he hasn't got any armor on. I don't know what it is; something in the way the lower part of his leg snaps forward at each step."

"Maybe I know," said Haas. He was sitting with his feet in a bucket of hot water; he had gone for a hike with Cahoon, wearing ordinary laced boots instead of the high-heeled Western footgear he was accustomed to. As a result what he called his atchilly tendons had swollen up, to his acute discomfort. "How's used to toting fifty pounds of stovepiping and other hardware with him. Maybe if you put lead in his boots it'd hold 'em down to the ground."

"Look," said Elsmith, "relax your knees, so they bend a little at each step. And drop your whole foot to the floor at once, instead of coming down on your heel. There, that's better. We'll teach you to walk like a commoner yet. Practice that up." He looked at his watch. "They're due here any time. Remember, you're Charles Weier to members of the Organization. They'll be introduced to you as Lediacre and Fitzmartin, but those aren't their real names either. Lediacre *is* a Frenchman, however."

"Why all the secrecy?" asked Sir Howard.

"Because, my dear Weier, if you don't know what a man's real name is, you can't betray it under the influence of veramin. The only people whose real names you're supposed to know are those directly below you. There's nobody below you yet, and for the present you're acting under my direct orders."

WHEN LEDIACRE and Fitzmartin arrived, they accepted their introduction to "Weier" without comment. Lediacre was as tall as the knight himself, though not as heavy; well-built, handsome in a foxy-faced sort of way, and exquisitely polite. He made Sir Howard feel like a hick. The other was a dark, nervous little man with a box to which he seemed to attach great importance. When the rest were crowded around, he opened it and began to assemble a contraption of pulleys, belts, brass rods, and circular glass disks with spots of metallic foil on them. Sir Howward gathered that these men were important in the Organization, and was

pleased to think that he was being let in on something big.

"Turn on the radio, somebody," said Fitzmartin. "The forbidden hopper wave lengths, can you?" When the set had warmed to the sinister chirping of a hopper station, he began turning a crank on his apparatus. Presently a train of blue sparks jumped from one brass knob to another in rapid succession. With the crack of each spark there was a *blup* from the radio, so that the twitterings were smothered. A program of dance music on one of the legal frequencies was similarly made unintelligible.

"You see?" said Fitzmartin. "With an electrostat with wheels six feet in diameter, we can jolly well ruin radio reception within a radius of ten or more miles. If we cover the dashed country with such machines, we can absolutely drown the bloody hopper communications with static. They don't use anything but the blasted radio. They absolutely abolished all the wire communications centuries ago, and it would dashed well take them months to rig up new ones. Absolutely months."

Elsmith puffed his cigar. "Then what?"

"Well . I mean . my dear old man . . if we could absolutely disorganize them—"

"It would take them about twenty-four hours to hunt down our static machines and restore their communications. And you know what would happen to us. But wait—" Seeing the crushed look on Fitzmartin's face, he put out his hand. "This is an excellent idea, just the same. I admire it. I merely wanted to remind you that the hoppers wouldn't commit mass suicide because of a little static. We won't build any of these yet. But we'll have a plan drawn up for the large-size machine, and we'll have a hundred thousand copies made and distributed to regional headquarters all over the world. Baugh can handle that, I think. Then, when we have something to give the hoppers the final push with, we'll have the machines built, and put them to work when the time comes. They'll be an invaluable auxiliary."

THE MEN stayed on several days. On the second day Sir Howard got a slight shock when he saw Lediacre and Sally Mitten strolling along a trail, apparently on the best of terms, and so absorbed in talk as to be oblivious of other things. He watched their figures dwindle, still talking, and thought, so that's it. He decided he didn't like the polished Monsieur Lediacre.

The next day he came upon the Frenchman smoking and looking at the view. "Ah, hello, my friend," said Lediacre. "I was just admiring your scenery. It reminds me of the Massif Central, in my own country."

"Are you going back there soon?" asked the knight, trying not to make the question sound too pointed.

"No—not for three or maybe four months. You see I am in business. I am a what you call traveling representative for a French company."

"Mind if I ask what sort of company?"

"Not at all, my dear Weier. It is perfumery."

Perfumery! Good God! He didn't mind ignoble birth any more, but perfume! Out of the tail of his eye he saw Sally Mitten come out of the camp. Now if there were only some way he could show this perfume salesman where he got off. He had a reputation for prowess in the more spectacular forms of horseplay. Fencing, jousting, and steeplechasing weren't practical.

He said: "I haven't been getting enough exercise lately; they've kept me so busy learning to jimmy windows and talk dialect. Do you wrestle?"

"I have not in a few years, but I

should be glad to try some. I also need the exercise."

"O. K., there's a grassy spot up the trail a way."

When the Frenchman had peeled off his shirt and boots, Sir Howard had to admit that there was nothing soft-looking about him. But he knew he'd be able to squash this commoner chap like an undernourished mosquito.

They grabbed at each other; then Lediacre went down with a thump. He got up laughing with the greatest of good humor. "I am getting stupid in my old age! I learned that hold when I was a little infant! Let us have another, no?"

Sir Howard tensed himself to grab Lediacre's left knee. He never knew quite what happened next, except that he found himself flopping in midair, balanced across the Frenchman's shoulders. Then he came down with a jar that knocked the breath out of him. In a flash he was pinned firmly. His big muscles strained against the lock, but to no avail. It made him no happier to note that Sally Mitten, Lyman Haas, and Eli Cahoon were interested spectators.

"Again, yes?" said Lediacre. It was "again," quite literally. Sir Howard sat up and stretched his sore muscles. Lediacre, very solicitous, said: "I did not twist too hard, did I? I learned that one from a Japanese man. I should be glad to teach it to you."

The knight accepted the lesson with thanks but without enthusiasm. The man, in addition to his social graces, was a big noise in the Organization, whereas *he* was just a rookie. And his attempt to demonstrate physical superiority had backfired. What could you do against a combination like that? Oh, well, he thought, if she likes him better she likes him better, that's all. We Van Slycks can't afford to let things like that bother us. After all, we have our self-respect to consider.

X.

THE TWO riders jogged south at an experienced horseman's long-distance pace: walk, trot, canter, trot, walk, over and over. A horse expert might have surmised that the enormous black gelding and the slim red mare were too fine a quality horseflesh to go with the somewhat shabby specimens that sat on them. Haas had grumbled about leaving his chaps and high-heeled boots behind, and had accepted the ancient felt hat with a couple of fishing flies stuck in the band in place of his seventy-five-dollar Western special only under vehement protest. Sir Howard likewise felt self-conscious as he never had when dashing about the country in alloy-steel plate. They had been allowed to tote their swords, as these would not attract the dangerous and unwelcome attention of hoppers.

"The idea," the knight explained to Haas, "is that my old man isn't supposed to know about this expedition. He thinks I'm up at Watertown or somewhere. Otherwise we'd just walk in and make ourselves at home. Personally I think they're making us do this play acting to see how good we are at it."

"I don't mind the dressing up so much," said Haas. "But every time I see a hopper I think he's gonna hop up and ask questions. It makes me uneasy as all hell. I never noticed 'em before; just considered 'em a nuisance you had to put up with. It's got so I can't enjoy cheese sandwiches any more; the smell makes me think of hoppers."

"Myself," replied Sir Howard, "I think I'd like that of a three weeks' corpse better. If they stop us, you know who you're supposed to be, and you've got a complete set of forged papers to prove it." He was feeling much the same way. A human enemy, whom you could knock off his horse with a well-aimed toothpick thrust was one thing;

this invisible power with its mysterious weapons and ruthless thoroughness was another.

"NOTHING in here," whispered Sir Howard. They had gone microscopically over the little room in the back of the tool shed that Frank van Slyck had used as a laboratory. Their flicking pencils of light showed nothing but bits of twisted metal, wire gauze, and broken glass.

Haas murmured: "Looks like the hoppers done a good job of cleaning up your brother's stuff."

"Yes. They examined his poor little apparatus and then smashed it up so its own mother wouldn't know it. They broke open the cases his bugs were in, and dumped the bugs out in the yard. They burned his notebooks, and took his textbooks away to put in one of their own libraries. Come on, there's nothing left to try but the manor house."

"You sure they ain't no secret rooms around here?"

"Yes. This shed is raised up off the ground, and there's nothing but dirt under it. The wall here is nothing but beaver board. You can see through the cracks into the tool room, so there isn't any space between walls or anything. Come on."

They calculated when the watchman would be at the other end of the grounds, then stole across the lawn. Sir Howard, being the heavier, boosted Haas up. Judicious use of a glass cutter gave him access to the latch, and the window opened with a faint squeak, no louder than the constant buzz and click and chirp of nocturnal insects. The slightly musty smell of the library mingled with the fragrance of the gardens.

"God help us," said Sir Howard, "if my old man finds out what we've done to his roses. He'll be madder'n a hungry wolf with nine lambs and a sore mouth."

They snooped around the room like a pair of large and inquisitive rats, running through desk drawers and wastebaskets. Sir Howard had almost despaired of finding anything when he remembered Frank's habit of putting papers between the leaves of books and forgetting them. His heart sank when he ran his flashlight over the well-filled stacks. There were hundreds of them, the books that had so bored him as a boy—poetry, fairy tales, romantic novels, theology. How different from the meaty Elsmith assortment! At least, he could use some selection. One shelf held books on farming, business, and other practical matters pertaining to the running of the duchy. If Frank had been reading any of the books, they'd be these. He and Haas began going through them.

Several blank pieces of paper were found, apparently mere place marks. Sir Howard put them in his shirt pocket. There was an exquisite drawing of a bee's head. There was a piece with several addresses on it. There was a piece with the cryptic notation:

Pulex irr.
M-146 Attr. fac. .17
M-147 A. f. .88
M-148 A. f. .39
M-149 A. f. .99 !!!

This was in a volume entitled "The Genetics of Stock Raising," which was about as scientific a book as the hoppers permitted. There was another sheet, in a small dictionary, with an algebraic problem worked out. There was—

"HANDS UP, you two!" A yellow eye opened in the dark, flooding the burglars with light. Behind the eye, barely visible, was an elderly man in a dressing gown. He held a burglar bow, that is, a crossbow with a flashlight fixed to its end. The bow was drawn and cocked.

"Easy on the trigger, father," said Sir Howard, getting up, "unless you

want to put a bolt through your heir and assign."

"Howard! I didn't recognize you." As a measure of disguise the knight had let his face alone for a week, and the resulting coal-black stubble was child-frightening.

"What on earth . . . what the devil . . . what in bloody hell are you doing, burgling your own home?"

"I was looking for something, and didn't want to get you up at this time of night. We can't stay, unfortunately." Sir Howard knew the excuse sounded feeble.

"What's going on here, anyway? What are you looking for? And who's this man?"

Sir Howard introduced Haas. "I was just looking for some papers I thought I'd left. It's nothing, really."

"What papers? That doesn't explain this . . . this—"

"Oh, just some papers. I think we've about finished, eh, Lyman? It's nice to have seen you, father."

"Oh, no, you don't. You don't stir out of here until you've given me a sensible explanation."

"Sorry, father, but I've given you all I can. And I really am going."

The duke was working himself up into one of his rare tempers. "You . . . you young . . . you leave here, equipped like a proper gentleman, and say you're going on a pleasure trip. And six weeks later I find you dressed like a tramp, running around with commoners, and breaking into people's houses. What do you mean, sir? *What do you mean?*"

"Sorry, father; it's just my way of amusing myself."

"It doesn't amuse *me!* You'll stop this nonsense now, or I'll . . . I'll cut you off!"

"That would be too bad for the duchy."

"I'll stop your income! I still control most of your money, you know."

Sir Howard was careful not to show how much this threat really jarred him. "Oh, I can get along. If need be, we'll join a traveling circus."

"You'll *what?* But you couldn't. I mean, that's preposterous. A Van Slyck working in a circus!"

"You'd be surprised. Remember Great-uncle Waldo? The one who swindled those bank people? I can get a job as a strong man, and Lyman here can do rope tricks. We'll manage."

The duke took a deep breath. "You win. I don't understand you, Howard. Just when I think you're turning into a sensible, level-headed adult you act like this. But you win. Anything would be better than that! A circus performer!" He shuddered. "By the way, how did you get over the wall?"

"Lyman threw his lasso over one of the merlons on the battlement. You know what a lasso is—a rope with a sliding noose. He's an expert. You remember, when you had the wall built, I advised you not to put those open crenelations on top."

"They won't be there long!"

"Oh, while I think of it," said Sir Howard casually. "Are there any pups in the kennels just now?"

"Let me think. . . . Yes, Irish Mist whelped about six months ago, and we have several that we haven't given away yet. Do you want one?"

"Yes, I'd like one."

"Why—if you don't mind an old man's curiosity?"

"Oh, I just thought I'd like to give one to a friend."

"Friend, huh? I hope she isn't another commoner wench?"

"Oh, you needn't worry about the Van Slyck escutcheon. It's nothing serious; just returning a favor."

"Favor, humph! There are all kinds of favors." The duke led them out to the kennels, and Sir Howard looked over the squirming Kerry-blue terrier

puppies with his flashlight. He picked one up.

"Don't you want something to carry him in?"

"Yes, if you have a basket or something."

"Hm-m-m—I think this would do. Sure you and your friend won't reconsider and stay the night?"

"No; thanks, anyway. I'll be seeing you. And by the way, better not mention our visit."

"Don't worry! I don't want everybody to know that my son's gone squirrely! Take care of yourself, won't you? And try to come back in one piece? I couldn't stand having anything happen. Please, Howard. Good-by and good luck!"

XI.

"I HATED to treat the old man like that. Hope I get a chance to explain some day."

"Hm-m-m. He did seem kinda riled up. Say, How, maybe that wasn't such a good idea, us trying to make Rensselaer. Maybe we shoulda stopped the night at Hudson. It's gonna be blacker'n tother side of hell. And I think she's liable to rain." Haas pulled his damp shirt front away from his skin. "Danged if I like your Yank summer weather, specially when it's fixing up to rain. Your clothes stick to you."

"If it starts to rain we'll stop at Valatie. That's only a little way; we just passed Kinderhook."

"Better use your flashlight, or you'll ride into the ditch. Is the little critter still in his basket? Cute little devil. Oh-oh, there goes a flash of lightning, off to the west. If I had my chaps, they'd shed the water."

"The lightning's over the Helderbergs. The rain won't get here for hours yet. Trot!"

Plop-plop-plop-plop went the hoofs. Something—something—made the hair on Sir Howard's neck rise. Did he imagine it, or was there a faint smell of cheese?

"Halt, Man!" It was the familiar, detestable chirp. A blinding light was in his face. He looked around for Haas, but the Westerner and his mount appeared to have vanished into thin air.

There were two of *them,* in one of their two-wheeled vehicles. Or rather, one was in the vehicle, and the other was out and peering up at him. He slid his right foot out of the stirrup. "Do not dismount!" There were chirpings and trillings in the dark, and the command, "Give me your reins!"

The vehicle purred ahead at a bare six miles an hour; Paul Jones trotted in tow. One of the hoppers had squirmed around in its seat to keep an eye on the rider.

He thought, these things belong to the road patrol. They're taking me to the station at Valatie—which the hoppers persisted in calling Vallity, to the annoyance of the natives, who claimed they lived in Valaysha. They'll interrogate me, probably with the use of veramin. They'll want to know who I really am. They may even want to know about Elsmith. I must not tell them. I ought to kill myself first. But maybe there's an easier way out than that. It's no use trying to run; they've got floodlights and guns. But if that fellow would only get a crick in his neck for a minute. His hand stole toward one of the saddle compartments—

THE PROCESSION drew up at the Valatie station. There was a hopper with a long gun by the door, a sentry. The two hoppers in the cycle got out. Another came out the door, and there was still another inside, using a typewriter.

"Dismount, Man."

Oh, God, he thought, I mustn't stagger. I must keep my brain clear. He scooped the small gray dog out of the basket on Paul Jones' rump.

"Enter. Wait! Leave your sword outside."

The knight unbuckled his sword belt fumblingly, and leaned the weapon against the wall of the station.

"What is that?" The flashlight made the puppy blink. "Dogs are not allowed in the station. You must leave it outside also."

"He'll run away, your excellency."

"Place it back in the basket, then."

"The basket has no top, your excellency. He'll jump out."

Twitterings in the dark. Then: "Leave it with the sentry. He shall hold it."

The sentry reached out. The dog squirmed away and whined. "He's afraid, your excellency. Wait; I have a leash."

The sentry took the leash in one hand and tried to scratch the dog's ears with the other. The dog backed as far as he could, trembling. Sir Howard slouched into the station with his best commoner walk.

"Your papers, Man. Sit here. Bare your arm."

The needle pricked. The hoppers went through the papers.

He thought, I must talk right. I hope this works. If there's a God, I hope He'll let me say the right things. Elsmith doesn't seem to think there is a God; at least, that's what he's implied at times. But if there is one, I hope He'll let me say the right things.

There it was, that tingling, that dizzy feeling. I must say the right things. If I start to say the wrong things, I've got my pocketknife still. I could get it out quickly before they could stop me. The throat would be best, I think. I'm not sure the blade's long enough to try for my heart. Let me say the right things—

It was beginning, now. The hopper who seemed to be boss was looking up from the papers. "You are Charles Weier?"

"Yes, your excellency."

"You are a professional hockey player?"

"Yes, your excellency." If only they wouldn't ask him questions about ice hockey!

"Where were you born?"

The form of the question was different; there might be a catch to this one. He was supposed to tell them "Ballston Spa."

"Ballston Spaw, your excellency." Thank God, he'd remembered in time! If he'd followed his natural impulse to use the downstate pronunciation of "Spah," he might have given himself away.

Twitterings. Then: "Do you know anything about a man, tall and dark like

you, who has appeared in the Hudson-Mohawk region lately, and who sometimes passes himself off as a William Scranton, and at other times pretends to be Howard van Slyck, the Duke of Poughkeepsie's son?"

"No, your excellency." If only he didn't get his own name mixed up with his aliases! Scranton—Weier—Van Slyck—he wasn't sure he knew which was which himself.

"These papers appear to be in order. We are examining men of your physical type in an attempt to solve the disappearance of one of our troopers last month. Do you know anything about it?"

"No, your excellency." Hot dog, he was winning!

More twitterings. If that was merely an order to check the stamps on his travel permit against the ledgers at Albany and Poughkeepsie, that was fine. The stamps were genuine. But if it was an order to check the permit itself against the central files in New York, that was something else.

"We are satisfied, Man. You may go." The clawed, buff-haired hand shoved the papers at him across the table. I mustn't stagger when I get up—I mustn't swagger, either.

AT THE DOOR there was no sign of the sentry. Its long gun lay on the ground. At the edge of the light from the open door lay its leather helmet.

Sir Howard was thunderstruck. He had no idea what could have happened. If they came out and found the sentry gone, they'd scour the country for it, and for him, too. He turned back to the door. "Excellencies!"

"What is it, Man? You were told to go."

"Your sentry has gone off with my dog."

The four hoppers boiled out of the station like popping corn. They examined the discarded gun and helmet, sounding like a whole bird shop. A couple of them hopped off tentatively into the dark, trilling, then hopped back. They waved their clawed hands and wagged their ratlike heads, burbling. One hopped inside and began cheeping into a microphone.

"What are you waiting for, Man?" It was the boss hopper again. "Your services are not required here."

"My dog, your excellency."

The hopper seemed to think for a moment. "Man, your attitude has been admirably co-operative. In recognition, we will, as a special concession, keep your dog here, if we find it, until such time as you call for it. Provided, of course, that you leave a deposit to cover the cost of keeping it. A dollar will suffice."

Sir Howard's economy complex winced, but he paid up, buckled on his sword, and led Paul Jones away.

Out of hearing of the station he began whistling, softly at first, then more loudly. There was a click of claws on the pavement, the scrape of a trailing leash, and the sudden pressure of paws on his knee. He put the puppy, squirming with frantic joy, into the basket, mounted, and rode off. He hated leaving his dollar with the hopper, but the risk of going back to try to claim it was too great.

"Hey, How!" came a hiss from the blackness.

"Lyman! What happened to you?"

"I seen those guys laying for you, but I couldn't warn you because you was too far up front—right on top of them when I seen 'em. Before they turned the light on I jumped Queenie over the ditch and into a field. I watched the hoppers tow you off, and I followed through the fields so's they wouldn't hear me. What happened to *you?*"

Sir Howard told him.

"Is that a fact? The sentry fella just plumb disappeared? I never. But how did you keep from telling them the truth,

if they doped you up with that stuff?"

"If anybody happens to notice an empty whiskey bottle in the ditch near the Valatie station, they can put two and two together, perhaps. Alcohol in the system counteracts the action of veramin, Elsmith said, and it looks as though he was right. But between the two of them I don't feel so good. You'd better ride clear, Lyman. It looks as though I were going to be sick from liquor for the second time in my life."

"O. K. Better aim to the right; that's downwind." Thunder rolled overhead. "Huh, there was a big drop on my hand. Looks like we're sure gonna get soaked tonight. But what the hell. I'd ruther be wet outside a hopper house than dry inside one any day."

XII.

"OH, thank you, Howard, thank you ever so much. I've always wanted one."

Not a bad reaction, he thought, especially considering that the pup didn't cost me anything, except that damned one-dollar deposit. I wonder what a new bicycle would do. Let's see—good bicycles are expensive—maybe I could get one wholesale. Oh, so *he's* here again, the knight thought disgustedly.

Lediacre appeared and began making French noises at the puppy, who seemed bewildered by all this attention.

"I don't know," said Elsmith. "If he can be trained properly, he'll be an asset, but if he turns out to be a yapper we'll have to get rid of him. He'd attract attention. Well, Weier, what have you to report?"

They went in, and Sir Howard spread out the papers he had found, meanwhile giving his story.

Elsmith stared hard at the pieces of paper. "We'll test these blank ones for invisible writing, just to make sure, though I don't think there's anything on them. The sentry just disappeared, eh, leaving his hat and rifle? That's funny. What do you know about what your brother was doing with his insects? Remember, we were out of touch with him for two months before his death."

"Not a great deal," said Sir Howard. "I was away from home during most of those two months, too, and he never took me into his confidence. I didn't even know about the laboratory until I came home after I heard the news. And by that time they'd smashed up everything and confiscated what they hadn't smashed. They turned the bugs loose in our yard. We had a regular plague of insects for a week."

"Hm-m-m. Hm-m-m." Elsmith lit a cigar. "Somehow I think your brother, and his insects, and the sentry's disappearance are all connected, though I don't see how."

Sir Howard picked up the scrap with the cryptic heading "Pulex irr." "Have you any idea what this means, sir?"

"I suppose it stands for *Pulex irritans*, the common flea. The M-146 might be the number of an artificial mutation, assuming that your brother was working on mutations. You know what they are, don't you? The thing to the right of it probably means 'attrition factor point one seven,' meaning that after a given length of time under certain conditions only one-sixth as many of a given batch of fleas were alive as would be with the normal non-mutated type. The exclamation marks opposite the M-149 presumably means that he had found a type of flea that would stand those conditions, whatever they are, as well as the normal type stands normal conditions."

Sir Howard thought. "Fleas don't bite hoppers, do they? Everybody says that flies and mosquitoes never bother the things. There's— *WOW!*" Sir Howard thought afterward that it was the greatest moment of his life. He couldn't explain how he had done it. One moment there was confusion and bafflement, and then in a flash every-

thing was clear. He saw in his mind the now-familiar picture of a small gray animal, scratching—scratching. "It's the pup!"

"What? What? Don't ever do that again, my boy. At least, not indoors, unless you want to give me heart failure."

"The puppy, the dog. Suppose Frank had found a mutation of the flea that liked hoppers. When they dumped all his bugs out, some of these special fleas found their way into the kennels, and were on the pup when I gave him to the sentry to hold. A couple of them went exploring and got on the sentry."

"Well?"

"Well, what would you do if you had a hat on and a flea crawled up under it and bit your scalp?"

"I'd take the hat— By Jove, I see. It's fantastic, but it seems to fit. Ordinary insects don't bother the hoppers because the hæmocyanin in their blood gives them indigestion. But if your brother developed a flea that thrived on hæmocyanin blood as well as hæmoglobin blood—and the hopper, never having suffered from insect bites, would be driven half crazy by them—they didn't bring any special parasitic insects from their own world—he'd take his helmet off and then not have sense enough to put it back on. With those synthetic minds of theirs concentrating on something else, they'd pull their helmets off to scratch without thinking—Where are you going?"

Sir Howard was already at the door. "Lediacre!" he shouted. "Where did the dog go?"

"He went with Sally, my friend. Or rather, she took him. She said she was about to give him a bath."

"Where? Where?"

"Up by the spring. You wish—"

Sir Howard didn't hear the rest of it; he was racing up the path to the spring. His heart pounded. At the end of the path a pretty picture came in view, framed by the trees: Sally Mitten on her knees, the sun in her hair, before a washtub. Over the washtub she held at arm's length a half-grown, smoke-gray, apprehensive-looking terrier.

"Sally!" His frantic yell, with all the power of his huge chest behind it, made the forest hum with echoes.

"Why . . . Howard, what is it? Have the hoppers found our place?"

"No . . . it's the dog." He paused to catch his breath.

"The dog? I was just going to wash him. He's simply covered with fleas."

"Thank God!" *Puff, puff, puff.*

"That he's covered with fleas?"

"Yes. Have you dunked him in that stuff yet?"

"No. Howard van Slyck, are you crazy?"

"Not at all. Ask your Uncle Homer. But I've got to have those fleas. C'mere, Mutt or Spike or whatever your name is."

"I'm going to call him Terence."

"All right. C'mere, Terence."

Terence looked at the knight, wagged his tail doubtfully, sat down, and scratched.

BY THE TIME he got the dog back to camp, ideas were sprouting like toadstools after a rain. Elsmith said: "It's probable that only a fraction of Terence's fleas are the kind we want. We shall have to find some way of selecting them from the mass. There seems to be quite a mass, too." Terence was nibbling at his silky flank.

Sir Howard said: "If we had some of that hæmocyanin blood, we could feed it to them, and the ones that didn't pass out would be the right ones."

"Yes," mused Elsmith, "and that would give us a check on the validity of our theory. I don't know how we could get a supply of hopper blood, though."

Haas drawled: "Maybe we could kidnap one of the critters and take his

hat off so he'd be harmless."

"Bravo!" said Lediacre. "That is the true American spirit, that we read about in France."

"Too risky, I'm afraid," said Elsmith.

"So," continued Lediacre, "does anything else have this special kind of blood?"

"It's almost identical with that of the arthropoda, especially the crustacea."

"Crustacea? You mean like *les homards*, the lobsters?"

"Yes."

"Then, my friends, our problem it is solved! One of our men is the manager of Vinay Frères, a restaurant in New York. Have you ever eaten there? But you must! Their onion soup . . . magnificent! I shall arrange with him to bleed his lobsters to death before cooking them. It will not harm them as food. And the blood we can smuggle up here. But how does one raise fleas? One cannot call, 'Here, flea; here, flea,' at meal time."

"One way," said Elsmith, "is to put them under a glass on your wrist. They eat whenever they want to then. But perhaps if we had the blood in thin rubber bladders, that they could pierce and suck through—"

ONCE STARTED, the flea farm grew by leaps and bounds. It took an average of five weeks to raise a generation to maturity, but there seemed to be no limit to their reproductive powers, at least when they were coddled as they were at the Adirondack camp. Sir Howard never had a chance to go to Amsterdam for a bicycle. Men came and went. Little Fitzmartin departed happily with instructions to have as many electrostats as possible built, and talking about how they'd absolutely smear the bally blighters. Lediacre was at the camp often. It was a crumb of comfort to Sir Howard that if he was too busy to squire Sally Mitten, the Frenchman was also. They drove from morning to night. A chamber had to be cut out of the hillside to accommodate thousands of fleas.

There was a colored man from a place called Missouri, who departed with several thousand peculiar pets concealed in the lining of his battered grass suitcase. There was a red-skinned man from the Southwest, a Novvo, who proved to be an old friendly enemy of Haas. Whereat there was much backslapping and reminiscing: "Say, remember the time we beat the pants off you guys on the South Platte?" "What do you mean, beat the pants off us? You had us outnumbered two to one, and even so we retreated in good order!" There was Maxwell Baugh, the new head of the Hudson-Mohawk branch of the Organization, to report that the local hoppers hadn't shown any signs of suspicion, but that they were still worried about the sentry, who had been picked up wandering idiotically, and was unable to give any coherent account of his actions after his helmet had been put back on.

Sir Howard began to appreciate what a big place the world was. He'd have liked to question these men of odd sizes and colors about their homelands. But there wasn't time; they came and left by stealth, often staying but a fraction of an hour. A bark from Terence, a shadowy form in the dark, passwords and mutterings, and the man was gone.

"AND NOW," said Elsmith, "we sit and wait. It's that damnable time lag."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"The time it takes for our messengers to get to all parts of the world. In prehopper times you could get to any part of the world in a few days, by flying machines and ground vehicles. But with the fastest means of transportation available to us, it takes a full month to get to places like Central Asia. So we have to wait. Fortunately most of the mes-

Sally Mitten

sengers to the faraway countries got away early; we sent a lot of our own men to save time. But one of them, our man to Iberia, was picked up by the hoppers. He jumped into the Bay of Biscay and drowned himself before they got any information out of him. But we had to send another load of fleas.

"So, my boy, for the next five weeks you can plan to spend most of your time hunting, fishing, and gardening."

"Sir, I'd like to run down to Amsterdam tomorrow—"

"I'm afraid not, Van Slyck. We'll have to lie very low for the next month. It would be intolerable to have something go wrong at the last minute. The hoppers haven't acted suspicious, but how do we know they're not playing cat-and-mouse with us?"

So, there wouldn't be any bicycle for Sally Mitten. And Lediacre was coming up again in a few days. Oh, to hell with it!

"About how many fleas have we raised altogether, sir?"

"I don't really know. Something like fifty million."

"That doesn't sound like enough. There are twenty million hoppers. Seems as though we ought to have more than two hoppers per flea—I mean two fleas per hopper. Though the fleas hop, too."

"We shall have. The messengers will establish stations for raising more generations of fleas in various parts of the world. Though one more generation is about all they'll have time for. Some of them are raising their fleas on the way."

"How will they keep them?"

"If everything else fails, there are always their own bodies."

"When is M-day?"

"October 1st."

The wait proved more difficult than the work, though Sir Howard did everything he could to make the time pass quickly. He threw himself into such occupations as were open to him with vicious energy, as when he walked five miles through the woods carrying across his shoulders an eight-point buck he had shot. He did little fishing. It wasn't active enough, and besides he was likely to arrive at Sly Pond to find the boat bobbing serenely in the middle of the lake with Sally Mitten and Lediacre in it. There was no fun in standing sullenly on the shore, and after the second occasion he hadn't taken any more chances. He'd rather take his bird glasses down to Little Moose Lake and watch the local pair of ospreys dive for fish. He read voraciously.

Toward the end of September, when the maples were breaking out in scarlet and gold, Maxwell Baugh arrived to discuss detailed plans for the York State uprising. Sir Howard discovered to his surprise that he had been picked to lead a contingent of heavy cavalry against such of the Albany hoppers as were not affected by the fleas. The plans had long been drawn up; it remained but to fit individuals into their places in the pattern.

SIR HOWARD held up his helmet. "This part," he said, "is the bowl. This is the visor. This is the bib or beaver."

"Goodness!" said Sally Mitten. "I suppose all those other pieces of armor have names, too."

"Well, well, don't tell me that I've found one subject I know more about than you, my sweet? Yes, they all have special names, and they all have special purposes. And I know 'em all."

"That's too bad, Howard."

"Huh?"

"I mean, if we're successful, armor will go out of use pretty quickly, won't it? People will have guns then."

"Good Lord, I never thought of that! I guess you're right, though."

"And they'll have power vehicles, too. You wouldn't want to go somewhere on a horse when you can go a hundred miles an hour in a car."

"I guess you win again, young lady. Here I've spent years learning to sit a horse, and hold a toothpick, and swing a sword, and jump around with fifty pounds of armor on. More tricks than a dead mule has flies. And now I'm helping to make all that expensive knowledge useless. I suppose it's too late to do anything about it now."

"Oh, I'm sure you'll get on all right. You're a resourceful young man. By the way, I never could see how men in full armor got around the way they do. I should think they'd be like turtles turned on their backs."

"It isn't so bad. The weight's distributed, and all these joints and little sliding plates give you a good deal of freedom. But if you try to run upstairs with a suit on, you know you're carrying something."

"I should think men would prefer chain armor. Isn't it lighter and more flexible?"

"That's what a lot of people think who never wore any. For equivalent protection it's just about as heavy. And there's the padding."

"Padding?"

"Yes. Without an inch or two of cotton padding underneath, it wouldn't be much good. A blow would break your bones even if the edge didn't go through. And by the time you get all that padding on, the suit isn't much more limber than one of plate, and it's hotter than the devil's private fireplace. Chain's all right for a little mail shirt like Lyman Haas'. That's just to keep some kind friend from slipping a dagger between your ribs on a dark night."

He buckled his last strap, picked up his helmet, and stood up. The fire threw little red highlights on his suit. "You boys ready?"

"Yeah," said Cahoon. "We be."

"Been ready half an hour," said Haas. "That'll be a lesson to me, to allow more time for lobsters to get into their shells."

"Howard—"

"Yes, Sally?"

"I wanted to ask you something—"

"Yes?"

"Be careful how you expose yourself. People who have never faced guns have no idea how deadly they can be."

Sir Howard van Slyck

"Oh. Don't worry, I'm scared to death of the things myself. Be seeing you. I hope."

XIII.

PLOP-plop-plop-plop went the hoofs. The fog was still rising off the Mohawk. You couldn't see anything but the other men in the troop and the glistening black road ahead. The mist condensed on their plate and ran down in little streaks.

Out of Schenectady, they passed the huge masts of the broadcasting station. A small fire near the base of the nearest mast made a spot of orange in the grayness. Three men were standing around the mast, and a fourth was kneeling at its base. He was chopping at a cable with a butcher's cleaver. *Chunk* went the cleaver. *Chunk. Chunk. Chunk.*

"Here's McCormack Corners," said a man.

"What's Weier taking us around this way for?" asked another. "It's shorter by Colonie."

"Dunno. Maybe they want to keep the Mohawk Pike open for somebody else."

They halted. Up ahead was a pattering of many hoofs.

"Single file," came back Sir Howard's baritone. "Walk."

They straightened out, and saw that a large troop of unarmored men with crossbows dangling from their saddles was trotting past along the Cherry Valley Pike. One of them called: "Hey, lobsters! What are you coming for? You'll be about as useful as real lobsters. We're the ones got to do the real fighting!"

"We're to fight the hoppers when they come out, and you guys pull foot," retorted one of the armored men. "Seen any hoppers?"

"Just one," a crossbowman called back. "Near Duanesburg. Funniest thing you ever seen. He just sat there on his cycle watching us go past. Didn't do nothing. Thought we was just a local war party, I guess."

"Local war party! That's good!"

"He didn't do nothing. Didn't even say, 'Halt, men!' I bet he was surprised when Schuyler, up front, put a bolt through him."

"What'd he do then?"

"Just keeled over and squeaked for a while. Then he didn't squeak any more."

The crossbowmen pulled up ahead. It was getting quite light. The mist faded. In front of them the sun, orange on top shading to deep red underneath, threw cheerful lights on the plate.

"I see the Office Building," said a man. "Suppose any hoppers are in it now?"

"Prob'ly," replied another. "They get to work early. One reason I never liked the hoppers is the early hours they keep."

"You call getting to work at seven early! You oughta work on a farm, mister."

"Maybe they'll see us."

"Maybe. They'll know something's wrong. That static machine oughta be going on any time."

"They got guns in the Office Building?"

"Ayuh. I think so."

"I mean big ones—artillery, they call 'em."

"Don't think so. They got all them up at Watervliet. That's where they make 'em."

"Well, this ain't Watervliet."

"No. But the guns at Watervliet could shoot clear down to Albany if they had a mind to."

"Huh? There ain't nothing can shoot that far."

"Oh, yes. They can shoot clear down to Kingston if they got a mind to. But that's why they have the static machines. So the hoppers can't radio back and forth to tell where to shoot."

"I hear we got guns, too."

"I think we got some. Some they stole from the hoppers, and some they made. But the trouble is, there ain't anybody knows how to work 'em. I thought of trying to get in a gun troop, and then decided I'd liefer stick to my old toothpick."

"Say, who's the twerp up front with Weier? Guy with a funny hat."

"Dunno. He's from some place they call Wyoming. Down South, I think."

"Don't see how he could make any speed with that hat. Too much air resistance."

"Hey, wasn't that a shot?"

"Ayuh. Sounds like it."

"They're shooting regular now. Weier better hurry up, or the fun'll be all over before we get there."

THE WINDOWS of Albany rattled to continuous gunfire when Sir Howard led his troop behind the Education Building across the street from the Office Building. Up and down Elk Street little knots of armed men waited. The knight told his men to wait, dismounted, and trotted around the corner.

Most of the gunfire was coming from the tall Office Building. All the windows on the lower floors of this building had been broken. From the nearer surrounding buildings came a stream of arrows and crossbow bolts. Barricades had been thrown up at the intersections. More crossbowmen, and a few men with rifles and pistols, stood behind these barricades shooting. Eli Cahoon was behind a near one. He was going from man to man, saying: "Now, take your time, son; just squeeze the trigger slow." In front of the shattered glass doors of the Office Building lay a pile of dead hoppers without helmets. Scattered over the broad Capitol Square were a score or so of dead men. A little puffy wind was rising. It picked up yellow and brown leaves from the piles raked together in the gutters and whirled them merrily around the square.

Sir Howard picked out an officer, a man in ordinary hunting clothes with a brassard on his arm. "Hey, Bodansky! I'm on time, I hope."

"Thank God, you got here, Weier! You're in command."

"What?"

"Yep; the whole shootin' match. Baugh's dead. He led the charge when they tried to get into the ground floor. Haverhill hasn't shown up; nobody knows what's become of him. And McFee just had his arm all smashed to hell by a bullet. So you're it."

"Whew! What's the situation?"

"So-so. We can't get in, and they can't get out. Olsen turned the fleas loose on schedule; they got most of the hoppers. But there were enough left to put the helmets back on the heads of some. The ones they didn't put the helmets on wandered out the front door like they were silly, and the boys potted 'em. I don't think you can get the boys to make another charge; they saw what happened to the first one."

"How about their cone transformers?"

"They've got a couple, but they can't use 'em because we turned the city power off. We got the power plant right at the start. They've got some convulsion rayers, too, but they're only the little kind, good up to fifty feet. Here's Greene." Another officer ran up.

"The riflemen's ammunition isn't going to last much longer," he gasped. "Half of it's too old to go off, anyway. And they're shooting pretty wild."

"Tell the riflemen to cease firing," Sir Howard snapped. He was feeling both awed by the unexpected responsibility and tremendously important. "We'll need them later."

"The bows and kickers won't reach to the upper floors," said Bodansky.

"We can't do much to the upper floors from here, anyway. We'll have to find

some way of getting into the lower floors." He thought for a minute. They were expecting him to produce some bright idea. If he didn't he'd be a failure. He raised his voice: "Hey, Eli! Eli Cahoon!"

THE OLD New Englander came over with his slinking walk. "Yeah?"

"Think it's going to blow."

"Hm-m-m. Maybe. Shouldn't be surprised." He looked at the sky, at the dancing leaves. "No'thwest. in about an hour."

"All right. Bodansky, have another barricade thrown across the yard bacl of the Office Building. Use furniture anything. Tell the boys to keep down close to it, so they won't be potted from the upper floors. Get all the crates and boxes in town. Pile 'em on the west side of the barricade. Get all the dead leaves you can."

"Bonfire? Smudge?"

"Yes. And get every garbage can in Albany! We'll show them something about smells. Hey, St. John! Get out the fire department. We're going to start a smudge, and when the smoke gets thick we'll run the trucks up on the sidewalk alongside the Office Building, and the boys will climb up the ladders into the windows."

He worked around behind buildings to the other side of the square, checking dispositions and talking to harassed officers. There were men in plate, men in overalls, men in store clothes. There were men with billhooks, men with bows, men with butcher knives lashed to the ends of poles. There were a few dead men, and an occasional wounded man being carried off.

The pile of assorted fuels grew, over beyond the Office Building. The fire department hadn't appeared. Why, of course, he thought, most of the firemen are on the firing line. I've been dumb. There has to be somebody to hitch up the fire horses. I'll have to get somebody to round 'em up. He gave orders; men ran, hesitated, and came back to have them repeated.

The bonfire began to crackle and smoke. It smoked beautifully. The breeze was just strong enough to wrap the Office Building in a shroud of pearly fumes, so that you could only see parts of it. Sir Howard heard a man near him cough and say, "Who the hell they trying to smoke out, us or the hoppers?"

There was a snoring buzz, and a flying machine swept over the buildings. More and more men neglected their shooting to stare up at it apprehensively. It circled and came back.

"They going to bomb us?" asked an officer.

"They'd like to," replied Sir Howard, "but they don't know where to bomb. They're afraid of hitting their own people. Tell your boys to pay attention to the Office Building; not to worry about the flier."

The machine appeared again, much higher and flying north. It was almost out of sight behind the buildings when it disappeared in a blinding magnesium-white flash. Sir Howard knew what was coming, and opened his mouth. The concussion made men stagger, and a few fell. It took the knight a second to realize that the musical tinkle was not in his head but was glass falling from thousands of windows.

Everywhere were scared faces, a few with nosebleeds. They'd bolt in a minute. He trotted down the line, explaining: "It's O. K.! We got Watervliet! We turned one of their own X beams on the ship and set off its bombs! Everything's fine!"

"They're coming out!" somebody yelled.

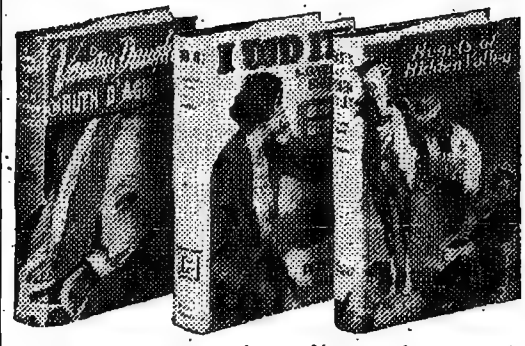
SIR HOWARD looked around. It would be logical for the hoppers to bolt, now that the arsenal had fallen. He ought to be with his cavalry troop on

the other side of the square. The shooting from the Office Building had slackened. It would take him all day to work around outside the zone of fire. He vaulted a barricade, almost fell when he landed under the weight of his plate, and started to run across the square with the queer, tottering run that armored men have.

He was halfway across when the hoppers boiled out of the Office Building by the front doors. He was right in front of them. There was a crash of shots from the guns they carried in their claws. Nothing touched him. He ran on. There were scattering shots from the hoppers, and something hit his right pauldron and ricocheted off with a screech. He spun half around and fell. Thank God, it was just a glancing hit, he thought. Better play possum for a few seconds. He thought he heard a groan from the human army when he fell, but that was pure self-conceit, as most of them had no idea who he was. He looked out of the corner of his eye toward the hoppers. They were bounding across the square toward the buildings. There must have been fifty; thirty-five, anyway. Arrows and bolts streaked toward them, mostly going wild. An arrow bounced off Sir Howard's backplate. God, he thought, is one of those idiots going to kill me by mistake? The hoppers had turned and were going back the way they had come.

Sir Howard scrambled up. In front of him men were dropping over a barricade and running toward him. They were shouting something and pointing. He looked around. Not thirty feet off was a hopper. It had a sort of gun in its hands, connected by cables to a knapsack thing strapped to its back. It was a lightning gun. It went off with a piercing crack, and a straight pencil of blue flash went past Sir Howard. It cracked again and again. A couple of the men who had run toward him were lying down, and the rest were running back. The gun cracked again, and the flash ended on Sir Howard's breastplate. All his muscles twitched, and his

NO MONEY IN ADVANCE



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bones were jarred. But he did not fall. The gun cracked again and yet again, with the same result. His suit was grounding the discharges. He got his sword out and took a step toward the hopper. The hopper went soaring away across the square after its fellows, who were bouncing along State Street.

People were dropping out of doors and windows and climbing over barricades. They came out quickly enough now that the hoppers were in retreat. If he didn't get his cavalry under way in a few seconds, the square would be packed and they'd be stuck like flies on flypaper.

Just ahead of the crowd Musik, his second-in-command, and Lyman Haas appeared at a canter. The former was leading Paul Jones. The men were clattering in double file behind them. Sir Howard yelled, "Stout fellas!", and climbed aboard. As he did so, Haas shouted: "The cavalry from Pittsfield is coming up State from the river!"

"They can't get through here; you tell 'em to go around by the south end of town and head west. Try to cut the hoppers off! All right, let's go!" They pounded diagonally across the square; men who had just run out ran back, like startled chickens, to get out of their way.

THE BARRICADE across State Street west of the Office Building was low, and had only a few men behind it. These shot wildly until the hoppers were two jumps away, then broke and scattered like flushed quail. The hoppers soared over the barricade and shot the men in the back as they ran. When Sir Howard arrived at the barricade the hoppers were far down State Street, their bodies rising and falling like overhead valves. Sir Howard put Paul Jones over the barricade. A terrific clang made him squirm around in the saddle. Musik and Musik's horse were standing on their heads on the west side of the barricade. Both got up quickly. Musik's horse ran along after the troop, and Musik ran after his horse on foot, yelling, "Come back here, you bastitch!" and falling farther and farther behind. Far away they heard the sirens of the fire engines, arriving at last.

They cut across Washington Park and galloped out New Scotland Avenue, keeping the hoppers in sight, but not gaining much on them. People ran into the street, ran back when the hoppers appeared, ran out again, and ran back again when the cavalry came along.

They got out into the southwestern part of Albany, where New Scotland Avenue becomes Slingerlands Road. A few streets had once been laid down here, but very few houses had been built. It was mostly just a big flat area covered with tall weeds. There were other horsemen on their left, presumably the men from Massachusetts. These were swooping along drawing steel bows. The combination worked beautifully. An arrow would bring down a hopper, and by the time Sir Howard's lobsters had passed over it, each taking a jab at it with a lance, it didn't look like a hopper. It didn't look particularly like anything.

The hoppers were spreading out. The men, without orders, were spreading out to hunt them down. Sir Howard found himself alone and chasing a hopper. He wondered what he'd do if the hopper got to the edge of the plateau on which Albany stands before he caught it. He couldn't gallop Paul Jones down the slope that ended at Normans Kill. But this hopper seemed to be going slowly. As Sir Howard gained on it, he saw that it had an arrow sticking in its thigh.

Sir Howard squeezed his lance and sighted on the hopper. The hopper stopped, turned around, and raised a small gun. The gun went off, and something went off in the knight's side. The saddle seemed to be lifted away

from him, and he landed on his back in the weeds. His side pained horribly for a moment, so that he felt deathly sick.

He couldn't see for the weeds, which stuck up like a forest around him. All he could see was the hopper standing there. The hopper raised the gun again. The gun clicked harmlessly. Sir Howard thought, if I can get up I can finish it before it reloads. He tried to sit up, but his plate dragged him down again. The hopper was reloading, and he couldn't get up. He could hear the drumming of hoofs, but they seemed miles away. He thought, Oh, God, why do I have to die *now?* Why couldn't I have died at the start? The hopper clicked the gun and raised it again. His side hurt terribly, and he was going to die at the last moment.

Then there were hoofs, near, and something snaky hissed out of the air to settle around the hopper. The gun went off, but the hopper was bouncing away in grotesque positions. It gave a final bounce and disappeared behind the weeds.

XIV.

THE DOCTOR at the door said: "He'll be all right. It's just a broken rib. A bullet went through his plate and grazed his side. The broken ends cut him up a little when he fell. Sure, you can see him." Then they all came in: Elsmith and Sally Mitten and Haas and Cahoon and Lediacre. The Frenchman was dirty and had a bandage over his left ear. He was very sympathetic.

They all tried to talk at once. Sir Howard asked how things were going. Elsmith answered: "Fine. We got word by radio—we turned the electrostats off—that all the broadcasting stations in New York had been taken. There must have been at least a thousand hoppers in the R. C. A. Building, but they mounted some captured heavy guns in Columbus Circle and blew them out of it. As far as I know, all the hopper strongholds in North America have been taken. There are some hoppers still at large, but they'll be killed on sight.

"There are quite a few holding out in Africa, but there's an Arab army on its way to deal with them, completely outfitted with hopper guns. They even found some people willing to take a chance on running the captured flying machines. Mongolia never got any fleas at all, but there were only a few hoppers there, anyway. It's pretty much the same elsewhere. Some of them got away in their flying machines and used their bombs and rays. They blew Louisville off the map, for instance. But they had to come down eventually, and there wasn't any friendly place to land. In places where the most fleas were released, and all the hoppers took off their hats to scratch, the way they did at Watervliet, it was simply a slaughter of helpless animals. I'm trying to save a few of them."

"Why?"

"Without the helmets they're quite harmless creatures, and rather interesting. It would be a shame to exterminate them completely. After all, they didn't exterminate us when they had the chance."

"Lyman! You certainly saved my hash."

"Wasn't nothing, really. That was a good cast I made, though. I'd used up all my arrows. Broke the hopper's neck with one yank. Guess that there helmet made it concentrate too hard on shooting you, or he'd 'a' seen me. Longest cast I ever made with a rope. The only trouble is they won't believe me when I get back home. I'll have to take the rope along to show them."

"How did you happen to get there just then?"

"Oh, I caught up with you. Those

truck horses you fellas ride ain't no faster'n turtles. It's a wonder to me you don't get some big turtles to ride. The shells would stop arrows and things, and you wouldn't need to worry about being blown off backward by the wind."

THERE WILL probably always be a Ten Eyck Hotel in Albany. They were standing in the lobby of the fifth building of that name.

"Are you going now, Howard?" asked Sally Mitten.

"Yep." This was a final good-by, he knew. He managed to sound briglitly conversational. "I'll have to see how things are down in Poughkeepsie. You and Elsmith are going, too, aren't you?"

"Yes; we're taking a boat for New York tonight. We sail at nine, wind permitting. I've never made the Hudson River trip."

"What are you going to do?"

"Some people are talking about making Uncle Homer an earl, or king, or something. But he won't have it. He's going to organize a university. It's what he's always wanted to do. And I'm still his secretary. What are your plans? Go back and be a country gentleman again?"

"Didn't I tell you? We've both been so busy. I've got a career! You know all those books I read up at camp? Well, they set me to thinking. For three hundred years we've been standing still under the form of social and political organization the hoppers imposed on us—I'm getting pretty good at the dictionary words myself, huh?—and they didn't pick that form because they had our welfare at heart, or because they wanted us to get places. They picked it because it was the most stagnant form they could find in our history. What I mean is that our . . . uh . . . synsynthetic feudalism is about as progressive as a snail with arthritis. So I thought it might be a good idea to try out some of this government-by-the-people business. No classes; all comrades together, the way we and Lyman were."

"I'm so glad. I was afraid you'd want to get back in the old groove."

"I thought you'd approve. You know what it'll be like: a wild scramble for power, with every little baron and marquis trying to get everybody else by the short hair. You know what their war cry will be: York State for the York Staters, Saratoga for the Saratogans, and Kaaterskill Junction for the whatever-you-call-'ems. But I'd like to see the whole continent under one government-by-the-people. Most of it was once. Or even the whole world, if we could manage it some day. Of course, a lot of our little lords won't like the idea. So I've got my work cut out for me. I don't anticipate a very quiet life."

"How are you going about it?"

"It's already started. I got together with some of the boys who think the way I do—mostly people who were in the Organization—the other night, and we formed something called the Committee of Political Organization for York State. Copoys for short. They made me chairman."

"Isn't that splendid!"

"Well, maybe the fact that I got the meeting together had something to do with it. I even made a speech."

"I didn't know you could make speeches."

"Neither did I. I stood there and said 'Uh . . . uh' at first. Then I thought, hell they won't enjoy hearing me say 'Uh . . . uh.' So I told them what they'd been through, which they knew as well as I, and what a swell fellow the late Maxwell Baugh was. Then I repeated some of the things I'd read in those books, and said we might as well have left the hoppers in control if we weren't going to change anything. They tried to carry me around on their shoulders afterward."

"Oh, Howard! Why didn't you let them?"

"I was willing enough. But one of the carriers was this little Fitzmartin, the electrostat man—his real name's Mudd, by the way—and he wasn't quite up to holding his half of my two hundred and some pounds. So the first thing I knew he was on the floor and I was sitting on top of him."

She laughed. "I'd like to have seen that!"

HE LAUGHED, too, though he didn't feel like laughing. He felt like hell. It was a very special kind of hell, new in his experience. "It looks as though I were cut out for politics. Jeepers, when I think of the snooty ignoramus I used to be! This may be the last time I'll wear the old suit." He patted the maple-leaf insignia on his breastplate affectionately. "I'm afraid my father won't approve of my program; I can just hear his remarks about people who are traitors to their class. But that can't be helped."

"Are you riding Paul Jones down?"

"Yes. My slat's just about mended, though I'm still wearing enough adhesive to stop a bolt from a Remington high-power. I don't mind it, but I hate to think of the day it'll have to be pulled off." He thought, come on, Van Slyck, you're only making it harder for yourself, standing here and gassing. Get it over with.

"You could go in one of the hopper vehicles, I should think."

"Thanks, but until I learn to run one myself I'm not risking my neck with any young spriggins who thinks he can drive just because he's seen it done." He added, "It was fun, wasn't it?"

"It certainly was."

It was time to go, now. He opened his mouth to say good-by. But she asked: "Do you expect to get down to New York?"

"Oh, certainly. I'll be there often, politicking."

"Will you come to see me?"

"Why, uh, yes, I suppose so."

"You don't have to if you don't want to."

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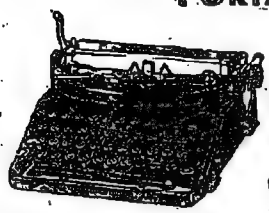

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"Oh, I want to all right. I want to worse than a fish wants water. But . . . you know . . . if you and Monsieur Lediacre . . . you mightn't want me—".

She looked puzzled, then burst out laughing. "Howard, you idiot! Etienne's got a wife and four children in France, whom he's devoted to. Every chance he has he gets me off and tells me about them. Etienne's a dear fellow, and he'd give you his shirt. But he bores me so with his darling little Josette, and his wonderful little René; such an intelligent child, mamzelle, a prodigy! It was especially bad those last few weeks in camp; all the time I was wishing you'd butt in and interrupt his rhapsodies, and you never did."

"Well, I . . . I . . . I never."

"Were you really going to make it good-by forever on that account? I could never have looked at a maple leaf in the fall again without thinking of you."

"Well, I . . . in that case, of course I'll come. I was planning to be down in a couple of weeks; that's— To hell with that! Where can I get a passage on this boat of yours? Never mind; there's a ticket agency right here in the hotel. I hope they ship horses; they'll ship my horse if I have to smuggle him aboard in my duffel bag. I see I've got some lost time to make up for. You once remarked, Sally, that you thought I had brains. Well, I admit I'm not a great genius like your Uncle Homer. But I think I have sense enough not to make the same mistake twice, thank God! What's more, I think I see how we can have a perfect revenge on our friend Lediacre."

"What do you mean, Howard? The poor man can't help—"

"No. He's a nice chap and all that. But some day"—he smiled grimly—"I shall take the greatest pleasure in getting him in a corner and feeding him a dose of his own identical medicine!"

THE END.

Returned From Hell

Continued from page 46

certain powers over flesh and things of the flesh—but still, you realize, I am limited. I cannot, despite what certain friends of mine used to claim, make two gold coins sprout where there is one. And Mr. Sadwin, strangely, possessed that ability. He met me as Monsieur Lackey; I continued with him as Monsieur Lackey, until that small matter could be arranged."

"Hope—" said Craig, with sudden, fearful understanding.

"Ah, yes"—Lackey nodded—"Hope Manners. The situation was complex, but the problem one of time. Hope was not only small—a woman—but blond. For that, she was, perhaps, a more suitable form than the dark Brenda. But—I was forced to have it that Hope Manners died, because of that peculiar monetary magic of your late friend, Mr. Sadwin, and now— To the world, she is dead. There would be questions, curiosity—

"Brenda, my name will be.

"But I assure you that I can transfer—and will. Mr. Sadwin can no longer help me. Mr. Sadwin—" The lean shoulders shrugged.

"I am Satan. Every man and woman knows these features—my name is used as a description of them! Do you think, then, that I *want* such a graven trademark on my every move? No; I chose Brenda Manners for one reason—that she is everything that this I wear is not. She is small, a woman, very beautiful in men's eyes. She, you see, is not—diabolic!

"Is there anything on earth just now that I can't do? Fool, who would fight me, as though he fought a common criminal!"

Craig stared.

"Get up," Lackey commanded, "walk before me and my assistant. I will take you to Brenda Manners. She should be glad to see you in these last few moments of whatever purity Broadway in New York left her."

Craig got up; he moved past Lackey and into the hall. But it was not his will that moved his legs; they were a mechanism on which he rode, having no control or direction of them.

XVI.

THE clock struck midnight.

Peter Craig stirred; he felt a lump of pain in his head, and his temples throbbed; his body was wretched with pain as though everything within it had been strained to the breaking point and would not last much longer. He regained consciousness slowly, and he became aware of chains that were about his wrists. His eyes opened. He raised his aching head. There was a rotten and fetid odor in the room which turned his stomach sour. He looked about him at the decaying corpses, the head, the torso, all of the rest. Then suddenly he saw Brenda.

"Kid," he muttered.

"Peter," she said.

The silence grew between them, as though they dwelt in hell, and waited only for the future Satan meant to inflict upon them. It was like living a

wicked life and dying, and then waiting like this, uncertain at best of what could be in store, for in the old life the greatest terror was death; and with that terror removed there was the trembling void of incomprehensible horror. You could be afraid of it, but you could not imagine its fullness. It was like the very existence of the universe, whose endlessness cannot be understood, and whose never-was-there-a-beginning and never-will-there-be-an-ending eternity is the perplexing unknown in the greatest minds on all this earth. They could not know what pain they awaited. They could only be sure that it would come, and that its depths would exceed any the mind could measure.

"Diabolism," she said, at last. "A man named Lackey practiced it; he worshiped too well, as you may see. He has reincarnated the soul of the Devil into human form. From back in the black Middle Ages it is here again."

"I'm sorry you're in this," Craig said.

"It doesn't matter; things are beyond mattering."

"Do you know what is to happen?" he asked.

"Yes; he is to lose his body. Or Lackey's body, and the spirit shall enter mine." She was trying to be brave and cool—resigned to whatever fate lay in store—but as these words trickled like water from her tongue, she shuddered. She looked up. "How is the wound on your head?"

"I'll live, I'm afraid."

AGAIN they were silent. The surf beat resoundingly against the stone walls guarding the château. The wind whined against the shutters on the windows, as though it was afraid, and yet rubbed against the building, purring like a big, sleek cat. The stench of death in the room ate like acid on the oxygen, so that it was hard to breathe, and the taste on the tongue of the air with the odor which clung in the nostrils was sickening. It was the hideous smell of that which rots.

"I don't know what's to happen to Hope," Brenda said.

"There is little we can do right now," Craig replied.

"Do you think we'll *ever* be able to do anything?"

"How do I know? How can I answer?"

"That is it, you can't. All of this so uncanny and so— Peter, perhaps, when we first suspected that Lackey was not a human man, perhaps then we should have left Deauville, gone back to Paris; it would have been cruel to leave Hope here, and yet, to be trapped ourselves, to be helpless, it is worse than—"

"You see now why, in the beginning, I hesitated?"

"Yes, I see."

"It was a strange premonition of this," he went on softly. "I don't know how it came to me. Perhaps seeing Lackey in the casino. But I knew that I should stay away."

"Yet you came; you died and were put in a coffin to get here."

"For you," he said simply. "You were so determined, and she is your sister."

"Peter, there are very few people on earth who are so—"

"Don't say it," he pleaded. "It has been of no value, except to encourage you falsely that something might be accomplished, and to entangle you in this death web. I'm miserable, mostly because of you."

"You mustn't be."

"But I am. In the car the other night I asked you a question. A stupid and incredibly simple question which must sound insignificant and even sentimental in here, where no part of reality can sound any differently. But do you remember what I asked you?"

"Yes," she said.

"And the answer?"

"The answer," she replied, and tears

dropped across her pretty cheeks. "The answer is, yes; I love you. If that confession is to do no more good than for you to hear it now, at least I must tell you. I present it to you, Peter, and we shall have that one small comfort between us, no matter what comes later."

"Then love exists even in hell," he said bitterly.

"This is not hell; this is—"

"The presence of Satan is hell."

She nodded.

THE DOOR opened and a large Frenchman entered. He wore a small mustache on his upper lip. He was heavy-chested, and he had large, dark eyes. He was garbed entirely in white.

"He was in here while you were unconscious," Brenda whispered. "It was he who chained you."

"Grim-looking individual—"

The Frenchman stared at Craig, and seemed to ignore Brenda. For a moment Craig thought he saw a similarity between the man's face and a face that was in his memory; but he could project up no name to go with it. Possibly he had seen the man on the streets in Deauville. Yet the illusive familiarity disturbed him.

The Frenchman turned his gaze to the torso and the human head. He glanced last at the headless corpse. He walked to a white laboratory table then and rather mechanically began compiling chemicals. His face was stoic and as unmoving as thin and fine marble. Craig watched him curiously.

"What is it you make, m'sieur?"

The Frenchman turned. "You considaire it the business of henchman of Diablo to inform prisoners what it is he makes?"

"Use your own judgment," Craig said. "I was just curious."

"Curiosity is a t'ing quite *dangereaux*, m'sieur. Take the case of the *mort chat*."

The Frenchman worked furiously. He stopped once to put on a gauze mask; then he continued.

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"You ask me the question as though I were *la femme belle dans Paree,* and you wish to become acquainted. But I warn you. Eef you are planning a trick, it is useless. I will do not'ings for you."

"I'm serious. Your face looks familiar."

"Mon name is Pierre Marsh." He frowned. "But I have nevaire in my life seen you before, m'sieur."

He went on working. He poured the contents of one test tube into another. Presently, putting the tube on a little blue flame to roast, he looked up.

"The preparation is for mademoiselle. That much I confide. She will enjoy it. It will render her possible for a transformation Diablo is about to make."

"So *soon!*" Craig cried.

"So soon, m'sieur. Almost at once."

"It's all right," Brenda said. "It's all right. It—" Her face was white; her lips twitched; in her eyes there burned the bitterness and sorrow of fear and uncertainty.

Pierre Marsh finished the preparation and took off the gauze mask. He was wearing rubber gloves, and he strode over to the small operating tables. He picked up the decapitated head by its hair. He looked into the horrible dead face; he pried open one eyelid, then he muttered and threw the head into the wastebasket. He made himself busy around the room.

CRAIG was struggling at the iron cuffs which held him. He was sweating. But he could not get free.

"We've got to get out of here! Some way, we've got to get out!"

"It's impossible now," she said.

"You aren't giving up?"

"What else can I do?"

He struggled with the chains.

"Keep hope," he pleaded. "Condemned men in prison keep faith until the very last moment when they sit

down in that chair— But this is worse than that death, and you must, therefore, keep twice as much hope and faith—"

"But—"

"I don't know how! Some way, darling! I am so helpless. I feel so much like I—"

"It doesn't matter," she said, "or if it matters, it's too late to think about it. The shadow of the inexorable ultimate keeps moving toward us; the sand is running out of the little siphon of time. Lackey will be here and—"

The door opened.

The Devil stood there.

"Pierre, *avez-vous faire—*"

"*Oui oui—*"

"Then we are ready," the Devil said; "we are quite ready to discard the body of Roger Lackey. Rotten and disintegrating thing that it is, we are ready to shed it, as a snake sheds his skin. And watch what happens. I have used my strongest will to hold it together. Watch, when I have done with it—"

He looked across at Brenda.

"I shall like my new form better."

As he spoke the door opened, and Alix dragged in the battered body of Mr. Winthrop Sadwin. He lifted it to one of the tables and let it lie on its face. The back of the head was split open.

Satan did not bother to glance at it, for he was moving toward Brenda now. On his narrow and pointed countenance there was an expression of uncanny contemplation; across his cheeks and his eyes there fell the shadow of hell; the skin sweated and glistened; the thin lips pressed back against the teeth. Slowly —steadily, he walked forward.

Brenda screamed.

XVII.

FOR A WEEK she had been stirring her listless body and trying to awaken, and now at last Hope Manners opened her eyes. The attention of Satan was elsewhere. For a moment she stared up at the glass of the coffin, and she was not sure even yet that she saw anything or was even conscious. Yet she felt the breath of life pulse through her, and she blinked to clear her vision, and she saw now what the glass was, that it covered her, and that she was lying on a silk mat which was very hard and straight. She turned her head and saw that glass walls incased her. Gradually consciousness was coming to her in fuller measures, so that she felt her hands against the bare skin of her body, and a moment later she realized that she was in a coffin and that a light shone down upon her.

For several minutes she lay thus, knowing that she was in a coffin, but trying to remember how she got here, and exactly where she was. Memory was slower in coming to her, and it was necessary that she struggle before she brought back to her mind the taxi trip and the gun which had pointed through a window and told her to strip. What had happened directly after this incident was more or less vague. She remembered Monsieur Lackey and his ringing laughter.

"For the posterity of humanity, my dear."

Shortly after entering the house she had been taken with a terrible headache, and after that she had lost consciousness. During this long void period through which she had lain, there were snatches of things that came back to her now—moments when she had been almost awake. Food which had been given her through glass tubes, exactly as she had received food once when she was sick in a hospital. Times when she had struggled to bring herself out of the Rip van Winkle lethargy, and had miserably failed. She knew that many days had passed, and yet now she lived; she had finally broken the spell which had held her in sleep—terrible, tormented sleep with its half-awakenings and its pain.

There was very little in Hope's mind other than these fragments, and yet when the very fragments were combined they seemed to her to make a vivid pattern. And that pattern was one of whole and complete hatred, so that there lived in her only the one desire; not to escape—that would come later—but to strike back at the Monsieur Satan who was responsible for the too-long siege of sleeping sickness through which she had just gone.

She was not even aware of why this one desire should burn so brightly; and yet there it was, deep within her, a thing which must find enactment; and whatever else there was to think of could come later, in the leisure of time.

Slowly, she reached her beautiful arms up and touched at the top of the coffin. It was heavy, but it was loose. They had to remove it whenever they attended her. Hope sat up now, as well as she could. She was cramped, but she had better leverage for her arms. She realized, somehow, the necessity for almost complete silence in this—her escape from the coffin of glass.

With enduring patience, she slowly slid the lid of the coffin down so that it extended from the foot of the glass box. She leaned up to a full sitting position now, and she breathed great lungfuls of air into her chest.

At last she stood, like a nymph. She did not know how she could get down. At last she slid to the stand which held the coffin, and jumping from this she held onto the edge of the stand, so that her legs hung down. She dropped from here to the carpet. She hadn't made the slightest sound.

She looked around the room draped in black, and then she moved into the hall. She walked along on the tips of her bare toes; she came into an antechamber, and she took a cloth from a table and tied it in a skirt about her waist.

Then she heard a man walking toward the chamber. She slid back up against the wall and hovered there. The man walked on through, dragging something behind him. It was dark, and she could not see what it was.

WHEN the sound of the man died away, she continued through the hall until she came to a stairway. She knew nothing of the rooms that were in the house, nor exactly where she wanted to go, but she climbed the stairs two at a time, and reached the second floor.

She walked quietly along the corridor here. She stopped at room doors and listened. She heard no sound whatsoever within the house; and outside, there was in her ears the crash and boom of the surf. She tried a room door at last. It was open and she went in.

There was only darkness, and she stood there and listened for fear that she might have disturbed someone. But she heard nothing, and she walked a few times around the room in her silent bare feet, and at last turned up a lamp.

She saw an empty bed, and a clothes closet. Some French newspapers were spread around. She presumed that one of Lackey's men lived here. She did not think very many people worked for Lackey. She didn't know where she had gotten that impression, but it was in her mind. She remembered—from somewhere in that long sleep—the name Pierre, who was a man who worked upstairs; and the names of two other men who worked below escaped her. But this must have been the room of one of them.

She looked in the closet and found a shirt and put it on. She was glad to cover her nudeness. Then she concentrated on the room, and at last she knew what she wanted to do. She took the newspapers and wadded them up. One she placed under the lacy curtains over the windows. Two other wads she placed in the closet. She tore at the wallpaper and bared the wooden wall.

She jammed a piece of dry paper under the wallpaper itself.

She found a match in a trousers pocket then, and she lit all of the wads of paper. She stood in the room to see if any of the flames would be lasting.

The curtains went up in a second, and the woodwork around them seemed to have caught. The blaze was going merrily in the closet. But the wall was her master stroke. Already the flame had seeped in between the seams, and the wall was a crawling snake of fire.

She hurried into the adjoining bedroom and repeated the entire procedure.

She set fire to two more second-floor rooms.

When she came out into the hall, the various fires were burning quite well and she went quickly for the stairs, but instead of going down she went up. She walked along the third floor. She heard sounds that were voices in one room, but she passed the room and found another stairway that went to the attic. Common reason told her that it would be impossible to get out through the front door unless you knew the trick of it, and the trick of opening the gate outside.

The attic was bleak and barren. There was nothing in it, but it was large. She walked through it, and a rat scurried out of her way. The rat stood up against the wall and stared at her through the darkness. The rat's red eyes shone peculiarly, and it was backed up as though it felt it was trapped and was willing to fight.

"Every creature must eventually fight," she whispered, "no matter the odds."

Eventually, she found herself out in one of the little turrets which bulged from the château. There was an open window in it, and the turret hung precariously out over the ocean. Hope Manners stood there and looked out at the blue stars shining in heaven, and the wan old moon, and the waves that glistened white.

She stripped off the tablecloth and the shirt, and she got up in the window. For a moment she stood up very straight, and then her body shot out; she straightened in a beautiful dive, and plunged for the water below.

XVIII.

CRAIG thought: It's an old trick; Houdini discovered it, and every detective knows it. But it's got to work now. It works on handcuffs if your wrists are small enough, and it's got to work on chains—

He relaxed his muscles; he strained to get out of the chains which were tight about his wrists. Almost since he had regained consciousness he had been trying to do this, but there was no time left now for patience. His cheeks broke out in a sweat, and his eyes were watery. He strained his wrists.

The Devil had taken the test tube and held it under Brenda's nostrils to produce a state of semiconsciousness so that her mind could not fight off his will as he labored within the body of Lackey to transfer the spirit of the Prince of Darkness into the lovely body of the small, dark-haired girl who so lately had been singing torch songs on Forty-fourth Street in New York. Yes, they would be torch songs if he succeeded—"Get Thee Behind Me" would be one; a rattling piano, a banging drum. The Devil, as the essence of feminine loveliness in Paris, or New York, or London. A French-speaking mademoiselle from hell. There would be no need to earn money by digging up the dead and restoring their life. There were other ways in which a girl could earn money—a girl whose soul would be complete and wholly evil, with no shred of conscience, sentiment, loyalty; none of the qualities which make even the very worst human being a little good.

The room's lights had been partly extinguished, so that there was a misty half-darkness here now, and in it the Devil stood, a shroud of blue swirling about him. He stood in a position of intense concentration, his flaming eyes directly on Brenda. His gaze never once flickered away. In the background stood Alix and Pierre Marsh.

Craig shouted and screamed and cursed to divert the attention and break or forestall the spell, but nothing that he could do or say made any difference The concentration of Satan did no waver.

As he stood there in that half-light the blue bubbling up through the ai about him, he seemed to become more o that which was Satan, so that you very nearly saw the spirit itself emerge a quarter of an inch from Lackey's body. It was like a film on which the print has slipped a little, so that there was a margin of blue cloud about the figure in the picture, like the mark of a blunt pencil. The atmosphere was terrible and intense. Brenda was motionless, helpless.

Craig kept shouting—striving to break away from the chains. He thought that a wisp of smoke clouded his nostrils, but he was frantic now, and things of that sort could not capture his attention. His eyes were riveted on Brenda to see if he could detect any change on her, but there was none yet.

Craig watched the Devil. He saw now why Brenda wasn't yet affected. The spirit—and you could almost see it, the force of the thought projecting it was so vital and strong—was slowly coming out of the body of Lackey, and had not yet reached or touched Brenda. But it could not be long. It could be but the matter of a minute—perhaps two.

Pierre took a step forward. The Frenchman's eyes were glazed with the sheer horror there was in the unearthly scene. Alix leaned weakly back against a table, and without knowing it, rested against the cut-open torso which lay there. He stared, as though hypnotized, at the figure of evil.

AS THE spirit moved from the body of Lackey—and it seemed to extend almost two inches now—the physical body that had been Lackey gradually sagged. The skin on the cheeks drooped, and fell against the bones, so that it was like a wet cloth laid over a skull. The eye sockets dropped back into the head; the shoulders slumped; the skin of the neck grew withered, and was changing to a blackish, waxy hue. The dead Roger Lackey was in the process of returning to the dead, and the gradual, sagging action of the already rotting skin seemed to suggest the belief that the body returned to its natural status with almost relief. The strained tenseness of the Devil's will which had held it up became wrinkled. The face had been handsome, but now it was an ugly crisscross of dead skin; the lower lip dropped down; the color vanished from it—

The Devil kept inching forward; a swirling blue spirit; it seemed reaching out to touch the girl, to go to her—

Pierre Marsh walked softly across the room. The big Frenchman's face was sweaty; his eyes were dilated with the horror he was witnessing; but his hands worked with mechanical efficiency, as though his body and his mind had been trained to perform under any duress and in any crisis of emergency.

Craig stared, unbelieving.

Marsh was beside him now; keeping his eyes on the Devil, he reached around and opened the iron cuff links on Craig's wrists. He put the key in Craig's open palm, and then he slipped away, behind the Devil.

Marsh turned up the lights.

"All right, Craig. If you can do anything, do it! There's a vial of acid on the table. Acid that will eat away skin while you watch. There is no other gun, but grab that!"

"I—"

"I have waited for this," Marsh went on. "It was our only hope against the Fiend Incarnate." His broken English had dropped away. "In his full strength we had no chance. Now look at him. He has spent all of this time trying to remove his spirit from Lackey. The spirit within itself cannot harm the living except by its influence on the mind. The spirit of the Devil is without physical recourse. His strength lies in what he can do through Lackey's body; but now he is almost out of it. And yet he has not reached the girl! It is our time to act!"

The sound had penetrated Satan's wall of concentration, and he was shaking Lackey's head, like a man in a stupor; the spirit was trying to retreat back within the already sagging skin. The skin would no longer take on a tense smoothness.

Craig leaped to the table and picked up the vial of acid; then he moved to Brenda. He unlocked the chained cuffs; he slapped her face to revive her, but she was still in a dazed stupor, though she remained on her feet, leaning back against the wall.

"Brenda!" he cried.

A HEAVY HAND fell on his shoulder, spun him around. Craig looked up with incredulous horror. Roger Lackey stood there, but the spirit of Satan still protruded like an imaginary waistline. You saw Lackey through the thin mist

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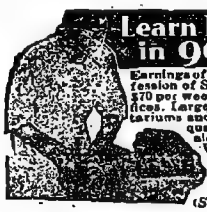

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of blue that was the Devil; the sagging muscles of the body; the wrinkled clothing; the skin which had fallen back against the skull; the half-dead eyes; the drooping chin; the gaping mouth. But it was the hand of this dead man that had pulled Craig around. So Satan still lived in Lackey, and he still retained some of his strength. He was fumbling in his clothing now for a gun.

Alix, meanwhile, leaped forward. Pierre anticipated the move and leaped upon him. The two fell to the floor, fighting.

Craig realized where he had seen Pierre now. Pierre was a member of the French Sureté, and Craig had met him in Paris. So Pierre had been here to investigate, and had fallen into the Devil's power. But he had not forgotten to be a detective. He had not given up, and this was his stand now—the fight for freedom!

The withered hand of Lackey still fumbled for the gun, and Craig drew his hand back. It was in this that the acid lay.

"Get back!" he said. "Get back. If I throw this there'll be nothing of you left. Nothing. The skin will peel away, and there will be only bones. Get back, Mephisto. The odds are against you!"

"Slobbering mortal fool!. Do you know what you are doing? Do you dare to interrupt *me?* You'll be damned in a thousand and one years of flame for—"

"Get back— Make your threats if you wish; they are empty at this moment. But keep moving backward—"

The blue shivered upward like flame, protecting the hideous old form of Lackey. The Devil took a single step backward—

Brenda was gradually regaining consciousness. She heard the shouting and the voices; she heard the fighting of Pierre and Alix, and she struggled to open her eyes. Her hand reached up, reached out, for she felt the presence of Craig near.

She did not know she was reaching for the vial of acid which was held in

Craig's hand. If she touched it, it would spill down in her pretty face.

She shook her head, reaching upward. Her fingers brushed against Craig's hand; but at that moment, while he shouted something, he had moved just a little, so that she had to reach up again. She wanted to touch him; she wanted to know that he was there.

Her lovely white fingers reached up, within an inch of the vial, and then closer.

Her eyes opened then. She saw the uncorked bottle. For a moment she had the impulse to touch it, and then she did not; instead, she withdrew her hand.

She saw Craig's back, and that the Devil was retreating; but retreating slowly, as though he were ready to leap to attack.

Craig said: "Back, keep backing—We're getting out of here."

"Do you think getting out of the château will do you any good?" The Devil was pawing at the wrinkled face. "How do you think that will help you? Don't you know I can pursue you until—"

Pierre Marsh got up off Alix. Alix lay there, unmoving, his head bashed. Marsh wiped his bloody hands and turned toward the Devil.

But at that moment the door swung open, and the Devil's other helper—the man who had killed Sadwin downstairs—came bursting into the room. Before he saw the scene which stood before him, he had shouted:

"Fire . . . the whole place is in flames!"

XIX.

THE WORDS were no sooner out of the frightened man's mouth than he realized something was amiss and he moved forward. Marsh leaped on him, and the weight of the big Frenchman bore him down. The other man struggled, writhed, fought, but Marsh pinned him to the floor; and now he had grasped him by the hair and was banging his head on the wooden floor.

Craig's gaze was attracted to the door at the announcement of the fire, and Lackey's form took advantage of this moment to leap for Craig. Craig kept his grasp on the vial of acid; but the Devil held his wrist, and then he bent his arm, and sent him whirling backward. Satan turned and fled from the room, passing Marsh and the other man who fought on the floor.

Craig recovered himself, corked the acid, jammed it in his pocket. The fight had carried Marsh and his opponent rolling out into the hall now. Smoke was drifting upward.

Brenda moved forward.

"How are we going to get out of here? What are we going to do? The Devil still lives in Lackey, and—"

"All we can do is try. Once Satan has lost the use of Lackey's body, there is no more physical harm he can do, and perhaps—"

He picked Brenda up, and carried her across his shoulder. He ran into the hall. It was choked with smoke. From the stairs he could see the yellow of the flames.

Marsh and the other man fought desperately. They rolled dangerously near the third-floor rail; their moving bodies bumped against it; the wood splintered. But Marsh withdrew in time. The other man went crashing through. His body plummeted downard; his scream came rocketing up.

Craig was already on the stairs with Brenda. The flame was climbing upward—crackling, growing. The château burned as though it were made of paper. Craig paused, reeled back; he did not know if it was possible to make it. Then suddenly he whirled forward, leaped down the stairs, onto the burning landing. He waded through hell's own flaming inferno.

He plunged on blindly—gasping and choking, carrying Brenda, the animal stench of singed hair in his lungs. Then

at last he was at the head of the stairway that led to the main floor. There was less smoke here. The fire had started on the second floor and the flames were traveling upward. The wind outside was howling now, and the whole house creaked and groaned under the ravage of the burning destruction.

Craig ran to get down these stairs, but a shot cracked out behind him.

THE BULLET zinged across his hip; it drew a ribbon of hot blood. His legs gave out; his body shot forward. Brenda fell away from him. She went crashing head over heels down the stairs. Craig came crashing behind her, unable to get a hold; and when he was at the bottom he stared upward.

He felt something very like a scream come to his lips, and then stop there, before bursting into sound. He stared, his face ashen.

The Devil stood with the flame licking about him, and Lackey's body was terribly burned; it seemed to melt on the bones, as though the skin was white lava, and dripped downward. The blue figure shone through and around the figure of Lackey. But it was Lackey's hand that had fired the gun. Craig could not take his eyes from the hideous sight. The gun hand lifted again, unsteady under the urge of rotting muscles.

Zip—zip—

The bullets splintered into the wood. Craig moved away, numbly, grasped the banister to gain his feet.

Brenda was already on her feet, moving toward the door that Marsh, the Sureté detective, held open for her. At the door she paused.

Craig moved away from the line of gunfire. He was halfway to the door. Then he stopped.

"What of Hope?"

"She must still be in the glass casket!"

"Go on then, you and Marsh. I'll find her!"

"No, Peter, you—"

"It's just my hip; just a scratch, that's all." He rubbed his hand across the trousers, and looked at the blood that was wet on them. "Take her out, Marsh," he shouted. "Take her out where she'll be safe."

"Peter, if anything happens to you—"

Marsh dragged the protesting girl out with him. The door slammed closed.

Craig stood there; he swayed. Then he stumbled toward the other room, limping; pain shot through his hip and into his body. It was a volcano of pain; it kept erupting, so that his whole being shuddered with it. The floor above was beginning to give away, and embers of flame dropped down. Smoke was billowing into the downstairs rooms now.

Craig groped toward the room that was done in black. He could scarcely see. The licks of flame kept dropping down from the floor above. He looked up suddenly. The room, smoky and afire, lay before him.

He stared at the empty coffin and looked around.

He limped from room to room. Blackness plunged like an electric light, on and off in his mind; off and on. The smell of the fire, the acrid odor of smoke, choked in his lungs; the whole rotting house seemed fetid and ancient and falling apart. His whole side throbbed with intense pain.

He kept limping, going from room to room. He thought he heard a scream of agony; but it drifted away, and the only sound in his ears was the steady, burning sound of the fire. Parts of the floor above were beginning to give away in whole chunks. Craig searched madly, feverishly to find Hope. He called her name. His voice was cracked and hoarse.

The first floor began to burn from the splinters and chunks of flame that had dropped down. He stumbled through the smoke-filled rooms. Flame roasted his cheeks until they seared

with pain. His vision was blurred; his eyes smarted and burned.

"Hope," he choked, "Hope."

There was no sound; no trace of the girl. He could only suppose that she had somehow managed to escape, though he did not ask his tormented mind how such an amazing feat could be possible. He could not longer wrestle with sanity in this house, and probe into probabilities. He could make suppositions and abide his decisions by them, and that was all.

HE ARRIVED back in the burning hallway, and fought to get to the front door. The pain in his side grew increasingly worse. He sagged against the wall and pushed his way along with blistering and burned hands.

He heard an unearthly scream.

He jerked rigidly to his feet. The scream sounded a second time. Something was rattling.

He stumbled through the smoke to the door. He gasped.

The Devil was here in Monsieur Roger Lackey—his only earthly form. The bony hands of Lackey were tugging against the door and could not get it open. But as Craig arrived the Devil turned.

Craig shrank in horror.

The sight squeezed terror into his heart. There was no more man in the dead Roger Lackey. The man, and all form of it, had gone; and yet the spirit of the Devil clung to it. The skin was melting, and most of it was gone; there was only the bare, bony skull, with drops of skin falling like drops of solder melting from a lead manikin about it. The clothing burned, and the odor of burned cloth was fresh in Craig's nose. He saw Lackey's skull, the gleaming, eyeless sockets, the protruding cheekbones, the gaping jaw with its white teeth perfectly formed. He looked down at the hands and saw only the bones of a skeleton.

And through this burned flesh of man Craig saw the shimmering blue specter

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of the Devil. He saw it there—a thing enraged.

Craig reached back for the acid. But there was no need of it now. He uncorked the bottle, and the skeleton lunged at him. He threw it all. The acid hissed as it went through the air; and then Craig lunged forward and struck down the quivering skeleton.

He struck it down, and the whole thing collapsed. There was nothing that could hold it up any longer. It fell into a heap of burning rags there on the floor. The skull hit with a clank. There was no movement. Lackey who had been so long dead was now truly dead.

Craig's eyes came up. The flame was all around him and before him. In it he saw the shining blue ghost of the Devil; just the faint trace of the figure; a burning something that might have been eyes. The Devil came forward and hurled itself upon Craig. But Craig felt nothing, and Satan retreated. There seemed to be in the vision now a terror, a realization. From the centuries it had returned to earth; and now it would go back into black centuries. Even as Craig watched, the blue figure moved backward through the crackling flames; backward—backward.

Craig tried the door; then he remembered it worked on a switch. He groped about the wall until he found it. He turned the switch, and the door opened. He plunged wildly out into the night.

He lurched down the stone steps, gasping the cold air into his lungs.

When he was on the lawn he collapsed.

The great ugly château continued to burn, and the flames streaked up through the night; the light was reflected from the sea, and for miles the fire was visible. The groan of the walls; the sigh of the wind; the thunder of the ocean's breakers. All of this rose in a crashing crescendo through the night; and at the peak of it, a phantom in blue hovered high in the sky, staring down; and then the blue vanished into darkness.

Into the darkness from whence it had come.

THE END.

---AND HAVING WRIT---

North—

Dear Editor:

The first issue of Unknown reached me last night. I have just finished reading it, and believe me, I've already received full value for the trial subscription I took. You are off to a most auspicious start, and it is my opinion that you have a magazine which—if I may coin a phrase—will fill a long-felt want. In other words, while I have read dozens of magazines dealing with the weird and supernatural, I have never before seen one with just the same type of stories as this first issue of Unknown.

As regards the physical part of the magazine, I note with joy that you have profited by your experience with *Astounding*, in such matters as illustrations, story heads, edges, covers, et cetera.

I liked the illustrations for "Sinister Barrier" and "Dark Vision," but the other illustrations were not at all superlative. If I may make the suggestion, Virgil Finlay does good work on this type of illustration, or at least, he did the last time I saw any of his work.

Since it is some time since I have read much fantasy fiction, I cannot comment much on authors, except that I'd appreciate it if you could present a story or two by C. L. Moore. Of all the fantasy I have read, her stories remain among the most vivid in my memory.

The stories themselves, in this first Unknown, are not so much to get excited about. I've read better many times—excepting, of course, "Sinister Barrier." Now there is the kind of story I really like! I have read stories dealing with the same subject, but none with such a fresh and entertaining point of view. And then there is always that faint, uneasy sensation that perhaps there might be a shred of truth behind it all. For there *are* so many seemingly inexplicable happenings—

But that's enough for this time. I'll probably write you often, to relieve myself of a lot of more or less uninteresting opinions, but in the meantime—best of luck to Unknown, and if it never has a worse issue than the first one, it will be as close to perfection as any magazine has a right to expect.—J. J. Johnston, Mowbray, Man., Canada.

East—

Dear Editor:

Thanks and congratulations for a really fine magazine. Unknown is really swell. Best liked in this issue were "The Sinister Barrier" and "Trouble With Water." The

first really made me stop to think a while, to pause and ponder and wonder. As for the latter, well, that was just a gem of a tale!

One thing, however, you stated that science-fiction fans didn't want fantasy. Taking myself as a fan, that doesn't hold water—the same thing goes for several other fans of my acquaintance. We *do* like fantasy. But, perhaps other fans like fantasy, too, but in its place—such as Unknown. From *Astounding Science-Fiction,* they want just that, science-fiction. Surely "The Moon Pool" was fantasy more than science-fiction—and they're still clamoring for more of that type!—John V. Baltadonis, 1700 Frankford Ave., Philadelphia, Pa.

South—

Dear Mr. Campbell:

My enthusiasm has gone beyond its bounds; reason: "Sinister Barrier." Anyone who tries to praise or to describe his enchantment in regards to this story is an ignorant, deceitful blasphemer. Perhaps a number of persons will try to praise this story, because the necessary words have not been invented.

If the first Unknown is representative of its future, then long may it reign. My only objection is "Where Angels Fear—" Whatever its merits, I still don't like it.

Well, I think that's all for the present, so disregarding my first paragraph, I dedicate this—Yesteryear had its "Moon Pool"; we have "Sinister Barrier"—May its reign be short.—Allen R. Carpentier, 4541 Rusk Avenue, Houston, Texas.

West—

Dear Mr. Campbell:

Just got and read your new magazine, Unknown. The feature story, "Sinister Barrier," is certainly a very ingenious attempt to thread together into a coherent story all those out-of-the-ordinary incidents mentioned by Fort and others. Of course, the story has inconsistencies here and there, but that is something it is very hard to get away from in writing straight fiction. Even you telescoped time a little between "The Passing of the Dark Star" and the following story. It is hard to counterfeit the natural passing of events, which in real life weave themselves naturally, but in fiction the writer seems every once in a while to "drop a stitch" somewhere. —N. S. Hofford, 451 So. Clela Ave., Los Angeles, Calif.

Gold did "A Matter of Form" in the December *Astounding*. Unknown will not use reprints.

Dear Editor:

As a first issue of a magazine, Unknown rings the proverbial bell—how do we abbreviate Unknown?—and, as a magazine, it outclasses every magazine in its class except its sister magazine *Astounding*.

Although I'd have preferred the two shorter stories mentioned on the Editor's Page, I'll say that "Sinister Barrier" can be described only by the most complimentary Goldwynian terms.

How in the name of all the saints in heaven and on earth did M. W. Wellman, who is usually a good writer, slip "Where Angels Fear—" into the magazine?

As for humor, "Trouble With Water" is darn good. Gold seems to be a new author. Is he?

"Who Wants Power?"—pretty good. You can get the case back if you want to. All you have to do is "think it down."

"Dark Vision" could have been put into *Astounding* as a nova or a mutant story. A story as good as that can be put in either magazine so long as I can read it.

"Closed Doors" and "Death Sentence" fit the *raison d'être* of Unknown. The idea behind "Death Sentence" is not entirely new.

I wonder which the straws of other *Astounding* fans blows.

There won't be any reprints in Unknown, will there?

How come Unknown came out nine days ahead of time?—Seymour Liff, 823 East Forty-sixth Street, Brooklyn, New York.

Too fantastic? But Unknown is not science-fiction, you know.

Dear Sir:

After finishing your latest magazine, Unknown, I could not wait to write you a letter, and give you my opinion on it.

The story "Sinister Barrier" was really a fine piece of work; so was "Where Angels Fear—" The rest were well done, except for "Trouble With Water" and "Who Wants Power?" They were a little too fantastic.

However, apart from a few faults I thought you really "had something." It wasn't trashy nor was it boring. In fact, I enjoyed it more than I thought I would. Let's say it exceeded expectations and let it go at that—even that's putting it mildly, however. Wishing you lots of luck.—Willard Hawley, 2043 S. W. Jackson, Portland, Oregon.

He did "Death Sentence" in Unknown No. 1.

Dear Mr. Campbell:

Congratulations on Unknown. I read the whole issue with vast delight. Parts of "Sinister Barrier" were beautifully done, the whole tale vivid and gripping. The stories in general— Well, you're doing something: putting first-class writing between the covers of a pulp magazine

I can tell you I'm darned proud to have a yarn in the first issue. In fact—after reading the book—I can't quite understand how I rated a place in it at all.

Again—congratulations! And good luck.—R. M. Williams, 6120 S. Greenwood, Chicago, Illinois.

The difficulty of assembling material for a new magazine, of a type authors don't yet know, always tends to make the first issue weaker than later numbers. Therefore—Unknown will improve, not weaken!

Dear Sir:

This is going to be a frank letter and we—my wife and I—hope you don't mind the following questions and comments, because we are science-fiction fans of years' standing.

We believe that you've started something with Unknown; that the stories in the first number were really different, and that the magazine may, because it apparently fills a want among readers of fantasy be a great success. BUT:

Will you keep Unknown at par with its first issue?

Or will you soon descend to zombies, werewolves, vampires, charnel houses and other rigmarole of current pulps that pander to the subconscious lust and sadism of hunmankind in an effort to hold the casual reader?

A couple of things encourage us: You've got to keep trying to equal Unknown's first issue, and you intimate that such is your aim—to keep Unknown actually unknown and different. The success of such authors as Bierce, Lovecraft, Wells, Fort, et cetera, indicate there is a large readers' market available to publishers willing to take a risk with this type of yarn.

Russell's "Sinister Barrier" was all you said it would be, and the other stories were uniformly Unknown; Long's "Dark Vision" being based on sound Freudian principles. "Sinister Barrier" was the best yarn we've read since

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"These Are My Brothers"—*Astounding* but not sure of correct name of story—and Lovecraft's two stories of the discovery of that elder civilization at the south pole.

May Unknown have a long and successful life—and more power to you.—Dorothy and Samuel Gordon, 225 Massachusetts Avenue, N. E., Washington, D. C.

Coming issues of Unknown will not use the future angle as much as did the first.

Dear Sirs:

The other day I bought a copy of your new magazine, Unknown. This March issue, I believe, is your first publication of Unknown.

Let me congratulate you on a very interesting and enjoyable magazine However, I believe your magazine would be more popular if it contained only stories concerning the present and the past. The magazines now on the market with stories laid in the future, are too numerous. Also, these futuristic novels are too fantastic. I believe, to be very popular with the public.

I may be wrong, but I think your new magazine would be a great success if it did *not* contain futuristic novels. Why not put ballots in the next issue of Unknown to determine whether the average magazine reader agrees or disagrees with me?

I sincerely congratulate you on "Trouble With Water," by H. L. Gold, for it humorous qualities and also for "Dark Vision," which I considered tops in the mystery stories I have read in the past year. I read plenty, too.

I hope I do not seem crude with my unwarranted criticism, but I am only trying to find better and spookier Unknown stories for myself and, I hope, many other readers of your many delightful magazines.—Bill Hibbs, 247 Lathrop Street, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Long's picture of humanity was not original with him—psychologists developed that.

Dear Mr. Campbell:

As a constant reader of *Astounding Science-Fiction*, I awaited the important announcement with impatient eagerness. It came. Then time and more suspense flowed by before I could inspect the reality of that announcement. Now I have completed the inspection; therefore, an analytical report of the first issue of Unknown is now in order Here it is, point by point:

1. Stories ranked in order:
   a. "Sinister Barrier"—Eric Frank Russell,

b. "Trouble with Water"—H. L. Gold,
c. "Closed Doors"—A. B. L. Macfadyen, Jr.,
d. "Death Sentence"—Robert Moore Williams,
e. "Who Wants Power?"—Mona Farnsworth,
f. "Dark Vision"—Frank B. Long,
g. "Where Angels Fear—"—Manly Wade Wellman.

2. Cover illustration:
a. Mood—supremely malignant.
b. Artistry—spheroid of Earth appears as a flat plane; entity colored masterfully: the idea put across is very effectively done by symbolism. My preference goes to symbolic covers over actual representations.

3. Inside illustrations:
a. Mood—absence of luridness from "Sinister Barrier." Illustrations give a reserved soberness well in keeping with the atmosphere in the first half of the story.
b. Artistry—fine.

That about finishes that; now to turn synthetic. In the first place, the definition of Unknown's field of literature is fairly satisfying, but somehow it seems too broad to me. All romantic fiction is imaginative, and most of it is entertaining—or meant to be. However, little of that fiction falls within the scope of Unknown, I am sure. The idea of fantasy must enter in the definition somewhere. But why should I quibble about a word when this first issue is exactly right, no matter how it is defined.

Please try to have the long feature story fantasy with a good dose of science; reverse the weird, pure fantasy, and fairy tales for the short stories. Another thing: shorten the long story by half and have two medium long tales. I read mostly on the jump; and in leaving a story unfinished I lose the mood which the author may have achieved.

"Sinister Barrier" began like a classic, a union of the ideas of Fort and the technique of Lovecraft. The author's note was an especially effective trick to gain reality, that "suspension of disbelief." The story, however, soon began to degenerate. Action and describing replaced atmosphere and Lovecraftian hinting. The suspense held up for many pages, but it soon collapsed with the identification of the "villain." The story's great charm lay in the mystery of it all, but when that was cleared up the actual struggle with the "things" lowered the story to just a more than excellent action tale. In this respect alone the story just missed a place beside some of Lovecraft's tales.

Long's story "Dark Vision" pictured the human race in such an evil light that it became mildly revolting. Wellman's tale "Where Angels Fear—" struck me as an ineffective use of an old theme. I was disappointed because I have come to associate something unusual and well told from Manly. I have no criticisms of the others as they were all very "imaginative and entertaining." "Who Wants Power?" was vaguely similar to the style of Hubbard's "The Dangerous Dimension."

My many thanks for giving us fans another magazine of the high quality of *Astounding Science-Fiction*. The best of luck with future issues of Unknown.—Donn Brazier, 3031 North Thirty-sixth Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Well, did "The Ultimate Adventure" fit Unknown as well as "Sinister Barrier"?

Dear Mr. Campbell:

I rather anticipated something extraordinary after the huge build-up you gave Unknown, but truly nothing as great as it turned out to be! It is, putting it simply and tritely, excellent.

I don't know when I have read such a stirring, "can't put it down till you're finished" story as "Sinister Barrier." The comparison with the epic Merritt yarns is perfectly justified.

The shorts, with the possible exception of "Dark Vision" and "Closed Doors," were all sufficiently above the average level to warrant favorable comment. The art work is good, the layout satisfying.

The only fault I can find is that Russell's story seems more logically to be entitled Unknown, and the current issue of *Astounding's* companion magazine being published for the sole reason of seeing that story in print. It is hard to fathom another story so excellently suited for the magazine.

I hope that Unknown continues for a long time to come. Congratulations on an outstanding magazine.—Russell A. Leadabrand, Box 264A, Route 2, Dinuba, California.

The first issue was put out as early as possible; thereafter, the second Friday every month.

Dear John W.:

I was pleasantly surprised to see Unknown on the stands February 1st. I had Febru-

ary 10th marked out on my memo calendar. Do you expect to have the magazine out on the 1st of each month, or the 10th?

I enjoyed every yarn but Gold's fairy tale. "Sinister Barrier" was tops. The best of the shorts is "Closed Doors"; the worst, already stated. I think, however, that Wellman's short is more of a straight weird yarn.

Upon finishing your new magazine, I can see where hack writers from the cheap horror, thriller, and terror tale magazines may try to invade Unknown with their bloodcurdling yarns. DON'T LET THEM! I think, John W. C., Jr., that you will keep the magazine clean of such stuff. I know from your competence in handling *Astounding Science-Fiction*. I also implore you to keep out fairy tales such as Gold's, no matter how smuggly funny they try to be.

The type of story that I particularly enjoy is one dealing with strange mental phenomena, I hope you have a novel of that type.

Again I say keep the magazine clean of all fiction, except that that can be classified as a type—Unknown.—Charles Cottrell, Box 461, Red Bank, New Jersey.

We're all Neophytes so far as Unknown goes!

Dear Mr. Campbell:

Perhaps I should begin by lauding to the high heavens the immense worth of this new magazine that I have finished not five hours ago. Yes, perhaps I should! But, I feel that it deserves a little more than that. On first sight, when I saw it in the big newsstand among the line of others, I thought it was distinctive, at least, and in the several days that passed after that purchase, for which chance I'd waited untold anxious hours, which ran into days and weeks, I thought a little more of it, and still more than that after reading the *last* story in the issue. After that story I was a bit apprehensive of the rest. They couldn't all be that good! But they were—as the worked leather covers of an expensive book you have inclosed this first "Unknown" in excellent style. A tremendous novel with the mental arousing power to awake a mind not closed by stupidity and a quite appropriate closing short story. Somehow, I lose all expression here to continue.

But perhaps I can continue a piece.

When I bought Unknown, I bought it with the foundation of *Astounding* supporting my interest. I bought it with the knowledge of *Astounding's* great worth and pleasurable hours it has given me these past many years. But now, Unknown can rest on its laurels. Verily, it doesn't need the uplifting hands of an older sister; it is grown strong and mighty suddenly, the wish of us all.

And I'll warrant that it is also the wish of us all that she'll grow even stronger and become the illustrious among all others. She has a beautiful name, so, why shouldn't she deserve wholesome sustainment? I trust she will.

I cannot with any degree, go into a description of what I liked and didn't like. I'd say that if ever a magazine hit the jackpot, this one did. I can't say that every story was liked equally well, because there is no comparison. I know that if I were an editor and discovered that someone liked every story, I'd look into the issue and not let it happen again. Human likabilities are too distinctly separable. But I want to make a comment upon one story—the first.

I can't begin to write how much I liked it, or describe the feeling I had. When I read the author's note and the clipping excerpt I felt a wonder of how anyone could imagine a story continuity that would be worthy of the things said about it in other parts of the magazine. When I had finished I felt that same puzzlement, though possibly a little more, because I know how hard it is to work out a novel that will cover the dimensions that Eric F. Russell's did. And I cannot begin to describe how colossal a story this novel is. I only know that there can't be any improvement upon what has already been said. Truly, it is the "greatest imaginative novel in two decades."

It sets me thinking. I only know, in closing, that I hope that *never* will the Unknown present such a "sinister barrier" as this depicted—and yet, who can tell?—The Neophyte, Box 1871, San Antonio, Texas.

"Cussing and discussing."

Editor Unknown:

I do believe that at last a magazine has appeared that is not "typed." With almost every other mag so definitely "typed" that all the stories are almost identical it will be a relief to read one in which the stories are truly "Unknown."

This first issue is really different. I think the arrangement is very good. An assortment of all kinds is a relief from the customary 100% Western, all love, or what have you.

Every story was very good, although "Trouble with Water" was a bit different from the

usual run. "Sinister Barrier" is a masterpiece. The careful attention given to minor details makes it very realistic.

I suppose a readers' department will appear in later issues. I always like to hear what others think. A good story is always worth discussing; or in some cases a bad one needs cussing.—S. S. Sowers, 4115 East Slauson Ave., Maywood, Cal.

The authors won't all be familiar. Many new ones are being found.

Dear Editor:

The new magazine, Unknown, is indeed a worthy companion to your first-rate science-fiction publication, *Astounding Science-Fiction*, which I read faithfully and with great relish every month.

The features which especially impressed me in Unknown are: the fine-grade paper, the subdued colors in the cover—may it continue!—the two Editor's pages, and, of course, the selection of familiar authors.

The story that best suited my fantasy-loving palate was "Death Sentence," by Robert Moore Williams. A truly excellent plot, plausible and thought provoking with a most delightful surprise ending.

Next for honors comes "Sinister Barrier," by Eric Frank Russell. Most fascinating! As far as I know it is quite original, too. It is a well-written, absorbing tale with just the right amount of suspense to make one dislike to stop reading until the very end.

In my opinion these are runners-up: "Closed Doors," by A. B. L. Macfadyen, Jr., "Where Angels Fear—" by Manly Wade Wellman, and lastly, "Dark Vision," by Frank Belknap Long.

Congratulations on work well done. Will be awaiting the next issue impatiently.—Dorothy Marie Dietrich, 602 N. Negley Ave., Pittsburgh, Pa.

The modern style of presentation is what I want.

Gentlemen:

I have just read Volume 1, Number 1 of Unknown, and, to say the least, it is colossal; mystical in the modern manner. Gentlemen, you have something that's different!

"Sinister Barrier"—great—out of the world in more ways than one. Best shorts included: "Dark Vision," "Where Angels Fear—" and "Who Wants Power?"

It's a great thing to pick up a magazine and know that its contents will be different—Unknown.—Robert A. Graham, Lakeland, Florida.

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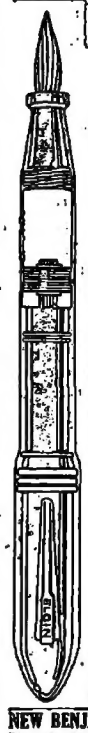

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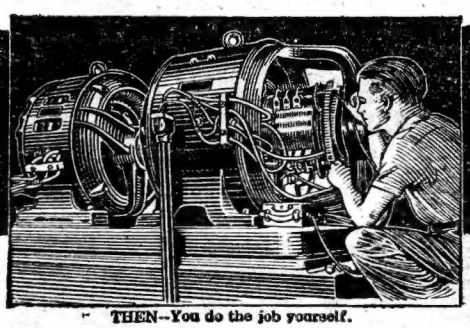

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